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A U S T R A L I A

Beyond the criminal record: An examination of how and why redeemability beliefs and desistance signals matter for employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record

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Abstract

For ex-offenders, gaining employment as part of the reintegration process is an important protective factor against reoffending. However, even when ex-offenders present favourably as prospective job candidates, employers remain unwilling to hire on account of an ex-offender's criminal record. Apart from the usual hiring considerations regarding relevant skills and qualifications, employers report additional concerns relating to a range of offence characteristics, such as the type of crime committed, sentence received, chronicity of offending and time since release from prison or most recent offence. Based on these offence characteristics, as well as ex-offenders' race, employers' perceptions of risk and concerns about re-offending motivate their unwillingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record. Even though most offenders desist from crime at some point, the predominant emphasis in research to date has been centred on the association between ex-offenders' attributes and hiring outcomes, with little known about what else matters for employers' willingness to hire. What is lacking in current knowledge is an understanding of what else might influence employers' hiring decisions when determining their willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record.

This thesis aims to address this gap by examining the role that employers' subjectivity plays in influencing how and why employers are willing to hire some ex-offenders and not others. In particular, this thesis examines whether a willingness to hire can be further explained by the beliefs employers hold about ex-offenders as well as their perceptions of ex-offenders. To achieve the aims of this thesis, I begin by adopting the Impression Formation model taken from social psychological literature to assess how and why a criminal record matters to employers and their willingness to hire an ex-offender. The Impression Formation model proposes stereotypical beliefs and individuating information (individual-level attributes) underpins the impressions we form about others. I then adapt this model to examine how and why employers' subjectivity matters for their willingness to hire an ex-offender. I rename my adaptation of the Impression Formation model as the 'Willingness to Hire' model. In my adapted model, I replace stereotypes and individuating information with two alternative concepts. First, 'belief in redeemability', regarding beliefs about whether offenders can change and desist from crime; and second, 'desistance signalling', regarding the particular ways an ex-offender can tangibly communicate their desistance from crime.

Using an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods research design, this study comprises a two-phase study approach. At phase one, a web-based vignette survey, adjusting only for race (Caucasian Australian or Indigenous Australian), is conducted with employers from Toowoomba, Australia ($n=367$). At phase two, follow up semi-structured interviews take place with a sub-sample from the Phase One survey ($n=43$). A range of statistical and interpretive analyses are used including

hypothesis testing, Multinomial Logistic regression, Ordinary Least Squares regression, mediation modelling, serial multiple mediation modelling, and thematic analysis.

Results from the survey data analyses demonstrate how offence characteristics differentially influenced employers' willingness to hire. Ex-offenders with multiple offences fared the worst. The analyses also indicate that race matters, which is consistent with previous studies. A belief in redeemability and desistance signalling is found to improve the chances that employers are willing to hire. Further mediation analyses show that belief in redeemability explains the relationship between desistance signals and employers' willingness to hire, and vice versa where desistance signals explain the relationship between belief in redeemability and willingness to hire. These findings are contextualised through the interview data analysis showing most employers subscribe to the belief that change and desistance from crime is possible. What differentiates employers with low redeemability beliefs from those with high redeemability beliefs is pessimism about the probability of change. Extending this further, employers identify desistance from crime within the context of communication environments where signalling occurs. These findings provide new insights about what else matters for employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender. The practical implications transpiring from these new insights relate to the use of anti-stigma campaigns to challenge pessimistic attitudes about ex-offenders, as well as the use of strategic desistance signalling designs to communicate desistance in ways that are recognisable by employers.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, financial support and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my higher degree by research candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications included in this thesis

No publications included.

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Contributions by others to the thesis

Dr Robin Fitzgerald, Professor Lynda Cheshire, and Associate Professor Rebecca Wickes formed my advisory team to guide the process of my thesis. In their capacity as advisors throughout my candidature they provided guidance on the formation of key ideas in my thesis, advised on my approach to the methodological and analytical aspects of this thesis, and provided both written and oral feedback on drafts.

Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree

No works submitted towards another degree have been included in this thesis.

Research Involving Human or Animal Subjects

Human research ethics approval was reviewed and granted by the School of Social Science Ethical Review Panel under clearance number RHD9/2014. Letter of approval is attached at Appendix 1.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to every ex-offender whose criminal record has damaged their employability appeal, and hindered their prospects for successful reintegration.

It is my sincere hope that the outcomes from this PhD research will be applied in practice and prove to be useful for ex-offenders in their reintegration endeavours.

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|---|
| AAPOR | American Association of Public Opinion Research |
| ABC | Australian Broadcasting Corporation |
| ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| AHRC | Australian Human Rights Commission |
| BTCC | Borallon Training and Correctional Centre |
| CREST | Community Re-entry Support Team |
| DJAG | Department of Justice and Attorney-General |
| ESMM | Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods |
| KMO | Kaiser-Meyer-Okin |
| LDS | Liverpool Desistance Study |
| MLR | Multinomial Logistic regression |
| NCVER | National Centre for Vocational Education and Research |
| OLS | Ordinary Least Squares regression |
| OR | Odds Ratio |
| PCF | Principal Components Factor |
| PRMS | Post-release Management Services |
| SCRGSP | Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision |
| SPV | Subjects per variable |
| SSI | Semi-structured interview |
| STAJ | Sentenced to a Job |
| TAFE | Technical and Further Education |
| VIF | Variance Inflation Factor |
| WOTC | Work Opportunity Tax Credit |

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYMENT FOR EX-OFFENDER

REINTEGRATION: An Introduction to this Thesis

“I’m grateful to live in a society that is still prepared to give people like I was a second chance. But I know in my heart that without the help of [...] other significant people I met during my prison journey I would never have been able to make the changes I needed to so that I could function well in civilized society.”

Erwin James, 2016

Columnist for The Guardian, Author, two convictions for murder

Introduction

Between the years 2000 and 2015 the global prison population increased by 20 percent, even though crime trends decreased during the same period (Rope & Sheahan, 2018). Likewise, in Australia where this study is situated, community-based sentences have also increased by a little more than 20 percent since 2008 (Productivity Commission, 2019). With increased rates of custodial and non-custodial sentencing along with associated issues of recidivism (Cullen, Jonson & Nagin, 2011) comes an increased need for effective offender reintegration strategies. One of the key elements of successful reintegration for ex-offenders¹ is having a job (Davis, Bahr & Ward, 2012).

For ex-offenders, gaining employment can be an important protective factor against recidivism (Bahr, Harris, Fisher & Armstrong, 2010) and, in time, most offenders eventually desist from crime (Brame, Bushway & Paternoster, 2003). Yet, there is a general unwillingness among employers to hire job applicants with a criminal record (Albright & Denq, 1996; Lukies, Graffam & Shinkfield, 2011). Nevertheless, employment prospects for ex-offenders can only improve if employers are willing to hire (Pager & Western, 2009). Ultimately, this places ex-offenders who want to work at the mercy of employers since an offer of employment is contingent upon their willingness to hire.

In 2011, a report published by the Ministry of Justice in the United Kingdom showed 97 percent of prisoners do not want to reoffend. For 68 percent of those, being employed is what they identified as the critical factor to avoid further offending (Ministry of Justice, 2011). The problem, however, is that ex-offenders are not well placed to obtain employment due to a range of barriers that hinder their

¹ As a point of clarification for this thesis I use the terms offender and ex-offender interchangeably to refer to anybody with a criminal record, not just prisoners or former prisoners (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2003). This is due to the emphasis in this thesis around the concepts of redeemability and desistance. Both of these concepts are more concerned with an offender’s potential for and process towards ceasing offending behaviour (Maruna & King, 2004; McNeill & Maruna, 2007), and thus an ex-offender. However, in some places throughout this thesis, the term ‘offender’ is more appropriate within the context of the literature being presented.

inclusion in the workforce. To begin with, ex-offenders typically have poor education, along with little to no work training and work experience (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey, Roberts & Engel, 2006; Sabol, 2007; Visher, Debus-Sherrill & Yahner, 2011). Adding to this, employers anticipate reduced work performance from ex-offenders due to poor physical and mental health, as well as substance abuse (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2002). Studies have also shown a propensity for employers to discriminate against some ex-offenders based not only on their criminal history, but also on the basis of their race and/or gender (Decker, 2014; Pager, 2007; Pager & Western, 2009; Visher et al., 2011). Although such discrimination is not necessarily unique to applicants with a criminal record (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes & Ferris, 2006), an ex-offender's race, in particular, does intensify the disadvantage already experienced on account of his or her criminal record (Pager, 2007; Pager & Western, 2006). Furthermore, as these factors are not amenable to change, the combined effect of race and a criminal record on employability is likely to endure over time.

On the other hand, educational, vocational and personal challenges may be temporary barriers to employment since these can be mitigated under the right conditions and with appropriate assistance. For instance, generally ex-offenders are able to access a range of programs and services to address education or work skills deficits in order to improve their chances for employment (Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Solomon, Johnson, Travis & McBride, 2004). However, the jury is still out with regard to whether these programs are effective for ex-offenders in terms of obtaining and retaining employment, or reducing recidivism, with studies showing mixed findings (Duwe, 2012; Farabee, Zhang & Wright, 2014; Gill & Wilson, 2017; Visher, Winterfield & Coggeshall, 2005). Furthermore, these educational, vocational and personal barriers and the way they are addressed are not constrained to ex-offender populations but can apply to any job applicant irrespective of a criminal history (Bills, 1990; Graffam, Shinkfield & Hardcastle, 2008; Hareli, Klang & Hess, 2008). Even though the effects of race, mental health, education and vocational deficits are over-represented in offender populations (Albright & Denq, 1996; Baldry, Clarence, Dowse & Troller, 2013; Fahey et al., 2006; Pager, 2003; Pager & Western, 2012), the single attribute that differentiates ex-offender job applicants from others is having a criminal record.

A criminal record alone prompts a range of additional concerns for employers, which are reserved only for ex-offender job applicants. Employers report their reluctance to hire an ex-offender depending on the characteristics of his or her offending history (Fletcher, Taylor, Hughes & Breeze, 2001). These include the type of crime committed, the chronicity (or frequency) of offending, the type of sentence received, the length of time spent in prison (if a custodial sentence was served), and the length of time since release from prison and/or most recent offence (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Fahey et al., 2006; Snider & Reyson, 2014). Unlike the mutable nature of educational, vocational or personal challenges, which can be addressed to improve employment chances for ex-offenders,

offence characteristics contained within a criminal record are static and cannot be altered in ways to shift employers' willingness to hire. Arguably, the way a criminal record negatively effects employers' willingness to hire may not be as static given the right conditions that could potentially mitigate these effects.

Whether or not the effects of a criminal record on employers' hiring decisions can be mitigated requires an understanding of employers' perceptions about ex-offenders in the context of their hiring decisions. Although research to date shows offence characteristics matter to employers and are associated with employment outcomes for ex-offenders (Albright & Denq, 1996; Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2004; Pager & Quillian, 2005), little is known about why they matter. To address this gap, my aim in this thesis is to provide an in-depth empirical understanding about why a criminal record influences the willingness of employers to hire ex-offenders. To accomplish this, I extend my inquiry beyond the influence of offence characteristics and turn my attention to examine employers' subjective assessments about ex-offenders that may also bear some influence on their willingness to hire. In particular, I investigate what employers believe about offenders and their capacity to change and desist from crime in accordance with Maruna and King's (2009) belief in redeemability thesis. Then, drawing on more recent literature around desistance signals (Bushway & Apel, 2012) and signal communication (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel, 2011), I examine how employers recognise signals that indicate an ex-offender's desistance, and whether these matter for their willingness to hire. I argue this is important to consider in the context of employers' hiring decisions, since social psychologists have demonstrated that what we believe about others guides the decisions we make about them (Postmus, McMahon, Warrener & Macri, 2011).

This thesis is significant because so far, the bulk of both research and practice has been directed towards alleviating the personal, social and vocational barriers to employment as they relate to ex-offenders with little attention given to employers. Since employers and ex-offenders both have instrumental roles to play in employment outcomes, it is crucial to address any barriers hindering the inclusion of ex-offenders in the workforce on both accounts. If the main emphasis in assisting ex-offenders into the workforce remains focussed on addressing barriers experienced by ex-offenders, (such as skill deficits) then we may have already reached the peak of the best employment outcomes we can expect for ex-offenders. Without identifying what also matters for employers when contemplating an ex-offender for employment and formulating ways to raise the appeal of hiring an ex-offender, current strategies to assist ex-offenders to enter the workforce may continue to be limited. Thus, my thesis addresses the lack of attention given to the subjective elements underpinning the process by which employers make hiring decisions about ex-offenders.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to provide some context around the significance of this thesis. I highlight the importance of employment for ex-offender reintegration and desistance

from crime and identify some of the problems that possibly contribute to employers' reluctance to hire. I argue that employers hold powerful and crucial positions within the broader scheme of reintegration whereby their willingness to hire might comprise the difference for some ex-offenders' reintegration success or failure. Since reintegration success is typically measured by rates of recidivism (James, 2015), I also discuss the issue of recidivism, reports about recidivism in the media and how this might adversely affect employers' perceptions about the risks connected with hiring an ex-offender. I then describe employment programs designed to assist with the reintegration of prisoners following release and highlight the lack of emphasis on employers' active involvement in these endeavours. Much of the extant literature and current reintegration strategies are aimed at prisoners, with less attention given to the wider offender population; a critical point I expand on later in this chapter. I conclude this chapter with an overview of the significance of this thesis, an outline of the focus and aims of this study, and a summary of the organisation of this thesis.

Defining the Reintegration Process and the Role of Employers

In a broad sense, reintegration refers to an offender's post-sentence return to the community. For some scholars reintegration is defined as a process whereby a prisoner is released from incarceration, returned to the community (Laub & Sampson, 2001, 2003) and reconnected with community life, family and positive social networks (Graham, Graham & Field, 2015). For others, reintegration is also identified as an important process that is relevant to offenders who have served non-custodial sentences, requiring the same kinds of social reconnection, such as good family relationships and employment, for improved chances of reintegration success (Farrall, 2004; Graffam et al., 2008).

Much of the emphasis in literature around reintegration is, however, on the reintegration of prisoners. Integral to the process of reintegration are programs and services aimed at meeting the individual needs of each offender prior to, during and after the completion of their sentence, to assist with resettlement back into the community and to avoid further criminal activity (Petersilia, 2003; Wheeler & Patterson, 2008). Developing ways to support the successful reintegration of offenders after a period of incarceration is crucial; especially given incarceration rates have significantly increased in western societies (Farrington, Langan & Tonry, 2004) with increases of up to 86 percent from 2000 to 2018, except in Europe where rates have decreased by 22 percent (Walmsley, 2018). Nevertheless, these figures directly translate to a higher number of offenders being released to the community, thereby highlighting the need for effective reintegration efforts.

Leaving prison presents major challenges (Maruna, 2011; Petersilia, 2003; Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009) that are complex (Halsey, 2010), with offenders facing numerous impediments upon release and throughout the process of reintegration (La Vigne, Visser & Castro, 2004). Apart from

the stigma associated with having been an offender (La Vigne et al., 2004), many are characterized and subsequently marginalized by low levels of education, poor physical and mental health, issues around drug and alcohol abuse, poor living conditions and little to no work history (Fazel & Danesh, 2002; Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). These challenges can be experienced by all offenders to varying degrees, not just prisoners, and with the addition of a criminal record, their marginalization becomes exacerbated. Some scholars argue that the risk of recidivism is greater when these personal and social deficits are not addressed (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002; Somers, Rezansoff, Moniruzzaman, Palepu & Patterson, 2013). For these reasons, reintegration programs provide much needed support and assistance to the individual ex-offender, aiming to address personal and social deficits in order to decrease the risk of recidivism and increase the chance for reintegration success (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009).

More recent evidence suggests that successful reintegration and associated desistance relies first and foremost upon the individual ex-offender's decision to change (Bushway & Apel, 2012). However, reintegration is not an autonomous, isolated, event entirely reliant upon the individual ex-offender (Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes & Muir, 2004). It is also dependent upon community stakeholders who play a vital role in the reintegration of ex-offenders (Bottoms et al., 2004; Maruna, 2011), as highlighted by James' (2016) quote at the outset this chapter. Recognition of this was made explicit in the Owers Review (2011), a review of the Northern Ireland Prison Service concerned with the efficacy of the prison system for successful reintegration outcomes. Emphasised in this review was an urge for increased community-level and broader social and political participation in the reintegration process, while citing that desistance from crime is both an individual and social process. The authors state "[e]veryone who wants to live in a safer and more peaceful society has a stake in successfully re-integrating offenders; so everyone should play their part in making re-integration happen" (Owers Report, 2011:20).

McNeill (2012, 2014) unpacks the concept of reintegration further, proposing four types of rehabilitation necessary for its success. The first, "psychological rehabilitation" (2012:31) refers to the internal change for individuals away from offending behaviour. Second, "moral rehabilitation" (2012:32), requires the ex-offender to make reparation for the misdeeds of the past before being accepted back into society's fold (McNeill & Maruna, 2007). While both of these are important for developing better thinking skills and self-value, there must also be reciprocal efforts made external to the ex-offender, which are outlined in the remaining two forms of rehabilitation. The first of these is the more formal idea of "judicial or legal rehabilitation" (2014:31) by way of a formal certification attesting to the ex-offender's rehabilitation and reinstatement of his or her full citizenship entitlements. In the context of employment, the legal rights of ex-offenders to work and not be discriminated against (Croucher, 2018) should be recognised as part of their legal rehabilitation, except when legal restrictions prohibit the employment of ex-offenders in some industries, such as

child care or licensed premises. Finally, “social rehabilitation” (2012:32) requires informal de-labelling and the social inclusion of ex-offenders back into the community by relevant community stakeholders, rather than continue the punishment of ex-offenders (Lam & Harcourt, 2003) after the expiration of their sentence by way of disenfranchising and marginalising ex-offenders.

Essentially, reintegration is everybody’s business and relevant community stakeholders refer to community members or organisations who are able to facilitate opportunities for ex-offenders to engage in community life and receive much needed social support that encourages desistance from crime (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph, 2002; La Vigne et al., 2004; Maruna & LeBel, 2003; Panuccio, Christian, Martinez & Sullivan, 2012). Some of these exist in the form of social support groups to provide a sense of accountability for ex-offenders to avoid further offending (Kerr, Tully & Völlm, 2018; Wilson, McWhinnie, Pichea, Prinzo & Cortoni, 2007). Others encourage ex-offenders’ civic engagement through meaningful community service (Glavin, 2012), or participation in cultural, religious or community groups (Meek, 2018; Meek & Lewis, 2014; Taxman, Young & Byrne, 2004). Also included are relevant service providers to meet the social, health and welfare needs of ex-offenders (Fox, 2015; Graffam & Shinkfield, 2012; LaVigne et al., 2004; Owers Report, 2011). In some cases, though, access to needs-based services may be bound by conditions or legal constraints due to the criminal record of the ex-offender and therefore limited in what assistance they can provide (Bushway, 2004; Pinard, 2010).

Employers are of particular importance amongst community stakeholders being the gatekeepers to opportunities for reintegration through employment. For ex-offenders, the fundamental link to employers is often facilitated through reintegration employment programs (Sabol, 2007; Visser et al., 2011; Western, 2007), or in Australia, employment service providers. Over and above the assistance available through employment programs and services, access to employment for ex-offenders is ultimately subject to employers’ discretion in their hiring decisions. When making these decisions, employers must balance their important positions as stakeholders in the reintegration of ex-offenders alongside their position as decision-makers for the future viability of their own business or workplace (Lam & Harcourt, 2003). At the same time, these types of hiring considerations may be overshadowed by the beliefs employers hold about the capacity for offenders to change, and whether signals of desistance are effectively communicated for employers to recognise.

By nature, hiring decisions are the product of a discriminatory process whereby employers discriminate between job applicants on the basis of each applicant’s merit, or perceived demerit, such as his or her criminal history, as well as personal attributes such as race or gender (Jewson & Mason, 1986; Pager, Western & Bonikowski, 2009; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005). In light of this, employers are different to other service providers and community stakeholders. In some cases, access to services may be conditional or limited by law due to the ex-offender’s criminal record (Chin, 2012; Pinard,

2006, 2010), such as working in an industry that legislates against employing applicants with a criminal record. Others may be obliged under government funding regulations to provide services to ex-offenders, like public housing, drug and alcohol support, welfare assistance, or even services to assist ex-offenders into the workforce (La Vigne et al., 2004). Employers do not share these kinds of obligations. Instead, employers provide job opportunities in accordance with their own needs, primarily for the benefit of their business or organisation (Bartram, Lindley, Marshall & Foster, 1995; Smith, Webber, Graffam & Wilson, 2004). By default, the authority to make hiring decisions, exempt from governing regulations or obligations, places employers in a unique position of power to ultimately encourage or hinder reintegration for an ex-offender. Consequently, the success of reintegration endeavours could be impeded if employers remain reluctant or outright unwilling to hire an ex-offender (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2006b). Yet our continued failure to understand why such reluctance persists may also mean that any improvements to current reintegration strategies may not adequately address the reservations employers have about hiring an ex-offender.

Employers on the Periphery of Current Reintegration Strategies to Improve Ex-offender Employment

Even though having a job is consistently reported in criminological literature as important for ex-offender reintegration (Novo-Corti & Barreiro-Gen, 2015; Opsal, 2012; Visher et al., 2011), the active involvement of employers in reintegration strategies aimed at improving employment outcomes for ex-offenders seems minimal at best. Reintegration strategies are predominantly aimed at incarcerated offenders and encompass a range of programs designed to support their transition from prison to the community (Bloom, 2006). These strategies emphasise assistance with housing, educational and vocational training, and life skills, as well as treatment for substance abuse and offending behaviour (Seiter & Kadela, 2003). The aim of each is fundamentally the same—to establish offenders back into the community as law-abiding citizens and reduce recidivism (Petersilia, 2003). Among the varied range of reintegration programs available to offenders, there is a consistent and heavy focus on work skills training and practical work experience (Visher et al., 2011). The objective of these particular programs is to address educational, vocational, and interpersonal communication skill deficits for ex-offenders and improve their employability appeal (Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Solomon et al., 2004). Indeed, Pager (2009) found that employers reported a greater willingness to hire ex-offenders with a track record of work experience and vocational training. Yet Pager (2009) also reported that some hesitation to hire still remained on the basis that having a criminal record raised questions around ex-offenders' reliability and trustworthiness (see also Hahn, 1991).

Whether or not employment-focussed programs are effective is questionable as evaluation studies report mixed results in terms of employment outcomes and/or recidivism. The issue of mixed

results should be treated with some caution, as Bouffard and colleagues (2000) highlight a lack of methodological rigor across many of these evaluation studies, which may have influenced differential outcomes. Nevertheless, more often than not, program outcomes show positive results in terms of ex-offenders gaining and maintaining employment (Bouffard, Mackenzie & Hickman 2000; Butzin, Scarpetti, Nielsen, Martin & Inciardi, 1999; Duwe, 2015; Saylor & Gaes, 1992, 1997). However, other evaluations have shown only a slight improvement in employment outcomes (Finn & Willoughby, 1996) or, more importantly, little to no reduction in recidivism (Visser, et al., 2005; Vito & Tewksbury, 1999), which is the broader goal of reintegration initiatives.

In the Australian context, programs specifically focussed on improving employment prospects for ex-offenders differ between states and territories. In Queensland, where the present study is located, offenders who are serving custodial sentences have at least three options to receive assistance with post-release employment—Borallon Training and Correctional Centre (BTCC); Community Re-entry Support Team (CREST Re-entry Services); and MARA (a Maltese word that means ‘woman’) (Queensland Government, 2018a). Previously decommissioned as a private prison, BTCC was recommissioned as a state funded facility in early 2016 with the primary goal of offering training, education and employment to prisoners (Burton, n. d.). BTCCs operations aim to partner with external agencies such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Queensland and employers to provide inmates with education and work training opportunities. The work industries sector within BTCC makes provision for external organisations/companies to operate from inside BTCC to facilitate inmate employment. The roles in which inmates are employed are designed to enable their continued employment after release (Queensland Government, 2016). As the reopened centre is still in its early days, no evaluation studies have been published to date with regards to employment and recidivism outcomes for released prisoners.

Outside of BTCC and since the commencement of this thesis, there have been two significant changes to the employment specific programs available to prisoners in Queensland. Between 2000 and 2016 the Advance2Work program, followed by the Pathways2Employment program (Queensland Corrective Services, 2016), was offered to some prisoners six months prior to release, with through-care during transition back into the community and a period of time post-release. Employment outcomes for program participants were only reported in raw data form. For instance, at 30 June 2015, 2,166 prisoners had enrolled in the Pathways2Employment program prior to release, 530 released offenders were supported in finding employment, and 386 maintained employment for up to thirteen weeks (Department of Justice and Attorney-General [DJAG], 2015). No further evaluations have been published with regards to program effectiveness in terms of recidivism or longer-term employment retention.

Later in 2016, Pathways2Employment was superseded by the CREST Re-entry Services (Queensland Government, 2016), which is concerned with a range of re-entry needs, not just employment. CREST is available throughout all Queensland Correctional facilities housing male prisoners (except Borallon), and Townsville Women's Correctional Centre (Queensland Government, 2018a). CREST offers three levels of support. First, in-prison information and referral services which are staffed in-house by prison staff and offer consultation to prisoners to discuss their needs in preparation for release. "Where possible" (Queensland Government, 2018a, In-prison Information and Referral Services section, para. 1) staff provide information and make appropriate referrals to outside agencies. Second, Post-Release Management Services (PRMS) involves a CREST worker to assist prisoners with re-entry plans as well as provide post-release support, which includes linking prisoners with relevant support agencies. PRMS is only available to prisoners identified by prison staff as eligible (eligibility criteria are unpublished). Third, crisis support is an additional level of support offered in cases of instability post-release but is only available upon referral from the individual's probation and parole officer (Queensland Government, 2018a). Even though post-release employment forms part of the focus for CREST Re-entry Services, any emphasis on active involvement by employers seems lacking, and access to employers is instead facilitated via third party involvement such as an employment services agency.

MARA, is a similar program available to women prisoners in Southern Queensland, offering gender-specific pre- and post-release support with regards to health, domestic violence, children and housing (Queensland Government, 2016). As part of these latest re-entry initiatives there appears to be no specific focus on employment for prisoners. This seems to be wrapped up as part of the support available at the first two levels (Queensland Government, 2017) through CREST, but not explicitly mentioned throughout MARA's service description. Whether CREST is an effective service in terms of employment outcomes is not known as any formal evaluations that may have been carried out have not been made publicly available. Some anecdotal evidence reported in the *Corrections News* online publication (Queensland Government, 2017) suggests there is promise and this may be due to the holistic approach to addressing the re-entry needs of prisoners.

At state and federal levels across Australia, the need to increase employment outcomes for offenders has been written into strategic plans and Government reports, with some adding the need to make the connection between offenders and employers (Borzycki, 2005; Department of Justice Tasmania, 2015; Government of South Australia, 2015; New South Wales Government, 2016; Parliamentary Committees, 2014; Queensland Government, 2018b, Victoria State Government, 2015). Whilst these recommendations to actively engage employers are promising for the future of reintegration strategies in the Australian context, the willingness of employers to engage cannot be compelled by mention in a strategic plan alone. Furthermore, acknowledgement is made within these strategies and Government reports that employment opportunities for ex-offenders may be thwarted

by discriminatory attitudes held by employers. Nevertheless, any added initiatives to address the barriers for employers in this regard and their associated reluctance to hire have not yet been forthcoming. If strategies to this effect continue to be neglected, we risk falling short of the anticipated employment outcomes needed for the broader aims of reduced reoffending and reintegration success.

Employers Perceptions About Ex-offenders in Light of Recidivism Statistics

Whether or not ex-offender reintegration is deemed successful is most commonly measured by reintegration failure, or in other words, recidivism (James, 2015). Recidivism refers to the re-arrest, reconviction or return to custodial or community corrections of those who have previously had contact with the criminal justice system (Fazel & Wolf, 2015; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision [SCRGPS], 2012). The consistent problem of recidivism creates an enormous financial burden for taxpayers and reduces the safety of the public (Henrichson & Delaney, 2012). However, the consensus amongst scholars is that recidivism and rearrests are most likely to occur within the first three years of release from prison (Langan & Levin, 2002; Makarios, Steiner and Travis, 2010; Payne, 2007; Petersiila, 2005; Pew Center on the States, 2008; Visser, 2007) with some studies suggesting the majority of recidivism occurs within the first twelve months of release (Holland, Pointon & Ross, 2007; Jones, Hua, Donnelly, McHutchinson & Heggie, 2006) before steadily declining afterwards (Langan & Levin, 2002; Visser, Lattimore & Linster, 1991). Building further on these studies, Blumstein and Nakamura (2009) provide evidence that the longer the period of offence-free time, the lower the risk of recidivism for those who have a criminal past until their risk eventually matches those who have never engaged in offending behaviour (see also Bushway, Nieuwebeerta & Blokland, 2011; Kurlychek, Brame & Bushway, 2006, 2007).

Notably, the bulk of recidivism studies that exist in the literature have concentrated on reoffending among prisoner populations (Bushnell, 2017; Fazel & Wolf, 2015). Few studies have examined recidivism amongst those who have served a non-custodial sentence but do have a criminal record (Visser et al., 2005). Bearing this in mind, there are two immediate implications that arise in the context of ex-offender employment. First, is the apparent urgency for prisoners to secure employment as soon as possible after their release from prison to reduce the risk of reoffending during the period of greatest vulnerability for further offending (Holland et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2006). Second, and perhaps not so apparent, is the lack of context around reported recidivism figures (Weatherburn, 2011) with regard to how this may promote negative stereotypes and adversely influence employers' willingness to hire ex-offender job applicants.

When contemplating the possibility of hiring an ex-offender, employers report that one of their main reservations relates to concerns around anticipated risks with respect to potential recidivism (Finlay, 2008; Homant & Kennedy, 1982; Ishmaru, 2008; Pager, 2006; Quillian & Pager, 2010). In

line with broadly held stereotypes about the dangerousness of those who offend, and especially those who offend and are non-Anglo Australian (Carnevale & Stone, 1995; Portillos, 1998; Spohn & Holleran, 2001; Steffensmeier, Ulmer & Kramer, 1998), employers perceive that ex-offenders pose a potential risk to the safety and security of their staff, customers and business (Lukies et al., 2011; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager & Western, 2009) because of anticipated recidivism. Employers may, however, overestimate risks of recidivism based on the way recidivism rates are framed by sensationalised media headlines. Consequently, the beliefs employers hold about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime may be adversely influenced.

Media reporting plays an influential role in what the public perceive about crime and offenders. For instance, Duffy and colleagues (2008) attribute the disparity between perceived levels and actual levels of crime in the UK to media reporting. An over-reliance upon the media for information about crime and crime salience is also reported in the American context (Garvey, 2003). Using data from the 2007 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes, Davis and Dossetor (2010) found Australians most heavily rely on television, newspapers and radio to inform their perceptions about crime and offending, whereas family, friends, the internet and work colleagues rate as less important sources of information. This is concerning given the conclusions of an earlier analysis conducted by Roberts and Indermaur (2005) suggested that relying on information from radio, family, friends or television leads to inaccurate perceptions about crime (see also Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013a).

It is reasonable, then, to expect that employers' perceptions about ex-offenders are also influenced by the same forms of media, in which case negative stereotypes are promoted. In his article *Uses and abuses of crime statistics*, Weatherburn (2011:10) criticises the media's propensity to misrepresent crime statistics, flagging the media as the "primary abusers of crime statistics". A case in point is taken from an ABC news headline which read "Most criminals likely to reoffend: study" (Australian Broadcasting Corporation [ABC], 2011). The article then goes on to talk about the high rates of prisoners returning to custody and not criminals or offenders more broadly, which does little to foster accurate and contextualised perceptions about the reality. Similar stories about recidivist prisoners are also contained under headlines such as "Reoffending rates on the rise across Australia" (The Weekly Times, n.d.), "Rise in re-offending shows that Victoria's new prisons won't work" (Barns, 2018) and in The Sydney Morning Herald, "Call for complete rethink as prison populations, recidivism explode" (Olding, 2016). However, in an interview with The New Daily, Naylor (cited in Mack, 2014, para. 23) warns that "if the media keeps saying that people who have been convicted are all dangerous and scary and should be off the streets, then you can't blame employers for saying 'I don't want to employ them and I don't want my staff and customers to be exposed to them'".

Every story that followed from the news headline examples above was about re-offending amongst former or current prisoners. The problem with these types of media headlines is subtle but

powerful in that they do not distinguish between prisoners and offenders. If employers are reading headlines like the examples above, then holding the stereotypical belief that most offenders will continue to offend and are a risk to employ would be valid, despite most eventually desisting (Brame, Bushway & Paternoster, 2003), and their unwillingness to hire would be justified. It is important that a distinction between those who have served time in prison (i.e. ‘prisoner’) and those with a criminal record (i.e. ‘offender’) be made explicitly clear to foster more accurate perceptions of ex-offenders. Making this distinction clear is important since studies from the US, Canada and Australia similarly report that widely held public perceptions about crime and offending are inaccurate and often converse to the reality (Indermaur & Roberts, 2005; Maguire & Pastore, 1999; Rex & Tonry, 2002; Roberts & Indermaur, 2009).

What cannot be ignored is the high proportion of former prisoners who are either rearrested or reincarcerated at some point, with recent recidivism statistics in both Australia and across the western world suggesting reintegration efforts are not very successful. Durose and colleagues (2014) report in their study that, over a five-year period, approximately three quarters of the prisoners released in 2005 across thirty U.S. states had been rearrested (Durose, Cooper & Snyder, 2014). Fazel and Wolf (2015) compared rearrest and reconviction rates of former prisoners only [i.e. excluding those who had not served a custodial sentence] across eighteen countries. Their report shows that over a five-year period the proportion of reconvicted prisoners is in excess of seventy percent in England and Wales, and fifty percent in the U.S. The proportion of reimprisonment over the same five-year period was highest in New Zealand at fifty-two percent, followed by France at forty-six percent and the U.S. at forty-five percent (Fazel & Wolf, 2015). In the Australian context, about half or more of the prison population at any given time is made up of recidivists (ABS, 2003, 2013b, 2017a; Zhang & Webster, 2010). In 2017, the ABS reported that 56 percent of the 41,202 prisoners who were incarcerated in June 2017 had previously served a prison sentence and that this rate has been consistent since 2007 (ABS, 2017a). However, whilst these recidivism rates are unacceptably high, without understanding what these high recidivism figures mean in the context of all offenders, and the importance of recognising that these reports refer exclusively to former or current prisoners, the level of risk that employers perceive in hiring an ex-offender may be exaggerated and feeding into their unwillingness to hire.

In Australia, for example, the total number of defendants finalised in all criminal courts (i.e. Children’s Court, Magistrate’s Court and Higher Courts) during the year 2016-17 was 607,375. Of those, a total of 44,079 defendants received a prison sentence, which equates to just over seven percent of all finalised defendants (ABS, 2018). This is the lowest proportion of defendants receiving a custodial sentence in the five-year period since 2012 with the previous four years consistently reporting just over ten percent of all defendants receiving a custodial sentence (ABS, 2014b, 2015, 2016b, 2017a). If approximately forty-five percent of prisoners are reincarcerated within two years

according to the Report on Government Services (Productivity Commission, 2018), a crude calculation of reoffending based on this rate would equate to 19,835 [i.e. 45% of 44,079] of the total defendants finalised in 2016-17, not 273,318 [i.e. 45% of 607,375]. In other words, the total reoffending contingent of those imprisoned equates to three percent of the total 607,375 defendants finalised. However, to the undiscerning eye, there may not be any distinction made between ‘prisoner’ and ‘offender’, where both have a criminal record, yet these recidivism statistics do not necessarily apply to both.

Making folk devils (Cohen, 1972) out of prisoners, criminals or offenders through media propaganda is likely to achieve the opposite of risk reduction as far as exclusion from the workforce and reoffending is concerned, since a high rate of unemployment is found among those who reoffend (Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle & McPherson, 2004b). By refusing to hire an ex-offender because of perceived reoffending risks over and above his or her ability to do the job, the withheld opportunity for the ex-offender to work may in fact increase his or her risk of re-offending, like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Although the employer themselves may avoid a direct risk, the overall risk is not alleviated, but instead, more likely to be aggravated. Adding to this, with media propaganda inaccurately emphasising the most disheartening aspects regarding crime, recidivism and the prison revolving door (Weatherburn, 2011), sensationalised news headlines are likely to do little more than feed the pervasive misperceptions about the risks posed by those with a criminal record (Davis & Dossetor, 2010). Meanwhile, the variety of benefits associated with hiring ex-offenders are overlooked or overshadowed, leaving employers with an unbalanced view.

Hiring an Ex-offender Reaps Substantial Benefits, so Why are Employers Hesitant to Hire? An Outline of the Importance of this Thesis

Ex-offenders, employers, and society more broadly all stand to benefit from ex-offenders having a job. Employers may disregard or be unaware of the benefits of hiring an ex-offender with the knowledge of such benefits being overshadowed by the messages conveyed through potentially misleading, although powerful, media reports about ex-offenders. In addition, by remaining on the periphery of most reintegration endeavours, employers may not recognise the benefits associated with hiring ex-offenders. However, there are benefits that transpire from ex-offenders finding and keeping a job that extend beyond the ex-offender to the employer and also to society (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2012). Nevertheless, whilst employers remain unwilling to hire ex-offenders, the associated benefits are foregone.

Of benefit to employers are the transferable skills to the workplace that ex-offenders may have after completing work skills programs or other vocational training while in prison or during their sentence, along with disciplined habits and good work ethics (Finn & Fontaine, 1983; Varghese,

Hardin, Bauer & Morgan, 2010). Beyond mere capabilities though, and perhaps more importantly, employers with experience hiring ex-offenders often report that ex-offender employees bear personal qualities that make a good worker (Barras, 2018; Brewer, 2017; Efron, 2016). For instance, Mark Peters, CEO of Butterball Farms, Inc in Michigan, hires ex-offenders on a regular basis (Lockhart, 2012). He describes ex-offenders as being extremely grateful for the opportunity to work given the difficulties they often encounter upon reintegration. In return, ex-offenders reciprocate with loyalty and prove to be valuable employees for employers willing to take a chance. Since employment is so difficult for ex-offenders to secure, once hired they are not likely to relinquish their position and will remain long-term employees.

Some employers report financial assistance by way of government tax credits or wage subsidies as being an attractive incentive for hiring ex-offenders (Hunt, Smart, Jonsson & Tsang, 2018; Lockhart, 2012). These types of incentives feature more within the USA, whereas in the Australian context no such financial incentive explicitly exists for the employment of ex-offenders. Instead, financial incentives are available for hiring a range of persons identified as being disadvantaged due to younger or older age (i.e., those aged 15 to 29, and over 50 years); Indigenous status; parental and caring responsibilities; or long term unemployed over 12 months (Australian Government, n.d.). Unless any of these disadvantage classifications apply to an ex-offender job applicant, Australian employers have no recourse to claim any financial incentives and so the benefits in this regard may be limited.

Hiring an ex-offender also encourages their reintegration and brings benefits to society more broadly. Life course theorists say that employment provides the ex-offender with an opportunity to ‘knife-off’ or break away from their past offending and is thus one of the crucial ‘turning points’ towards desistance from crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Social control theorists argue that employment provides pro-social ties to society for the ex-offender, thereby reducing their affiliation with criminal networks and consequently their likelihood of further offending (Bahr et. al., 2010; Sampson & Laub, 1997; Steiner, Makarios, Travis III & Meade 2012; Uggen, 1999; Uggen & Staff, 2001 & Wilson, 1997). Sampson and Laub (1995) propose that it is these social connections forged through employment, rather than employment itself, that protects against further offending. Desistance theorists suggest that having a job enables ex-offenders to build social capital which provides a sense of social inclusion (Farrall, 2002), return to a life lived in accordance with values of conformity (Shapland & Bottoms, 2011), and facilitates an opportunity to make up for their past offending by contributing back to society, and enables ex-offenders to demonstrate their desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001).

In support of these theoretical propositions that employment can be a protective factor against reoffending, it is estimated that 60 to 70 percent of recidivists are unemployed at the time of their

reoffending (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research [NCVER], 2007). Meredith, Speir and Johnson (2007) state that parolees who are employed are up to three times more likely to remain offence free than their unemployed counterparts. Similarly, Farrington (2003) investigated the relationship between employment and reoffending and found that ex-offenders in stable employment were much less likely to reoffend than those who remained unemployed.

While the community enjoys lower reoffending rates, employment is also important for the ex-offender's personal development. Employment enables ex-offenders to contribute back to society through payment of taxes, in turn decreasing the financial burden on the government and communities caused by offending behaviour, while at the same time improving community safety (Lukies et al., 2011; Marbley & Ferguson, 2005; Shiraldi & Greene, 2002). The financial stability associated with having a job is also reported to improve ex-offenders' self-esteem and promote desistance from crime (Albright & Denq, 1996).

Despite this range of benefits, the labour market remains largely inaccessible for ex-offenders who are motivated to work (Howard, 2013) due to the enduring reluctance among employers to hire (Pager & Quillian, 2005; Varghese et al., 2010). Nevertheless, understanding ways to increase employment for ex-offenders is critical given some of the highest incarceration rates are seen across the world now more than ever before. With increased incarceration rates comes an increase in the number of prisoners being reintegrated into society following their release from prison (Guerino, Harrison & Sabol, 2011; Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Petersilia, 2003; Sabol & Harrison, 2007; West, Sabol & Greenman, 2010). Moreover, very few offenders receive indeterminate sentences prohibiting their release from prison, therefore the majority of those incarcerated will eventually be released (Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Petersilia, 2005; Travis, 2005).

Queensland is no exception to imposing a high rate of custodial and non-custodial sentences on offenders, and thus forms part of the significance of this thesis being conducted in Queensland. At the end of June 2018, the rate of imprisonment in Queensland was 227 per 100,000, which was higher than the national rate at 222 per 100,000. As well, Queensland is reported to be one of the largest contributors to the national prisoner population (ABS, 2018). However, since this study is concerned with employers' perspectives of offenders across the board, not just prisoners, the current high rate of community-based corrections orders in Queensland provides further support for the significance of this thesis. At the end of the same period, June 2018, Queensland accounted for the highest contribution to the overall number of community-based corrections orders (i.e. 29%) across Australia. On the basis of these figures I argue that the need for successful reintegration endeavours, particularly ex-offender employment, is great.

The Focus and Aims of the Present Study

In his article, McNeill (2012) points out that “no amount of supporting offenders to change themselves can be sufficient to the tasks and challenges of rehabilitation and desistance, if legal and practical barriers to reintegration are left in place” (McNeill, 2012:36). I suggest that the same argument also applies to ex-offender employment outcomes if the barriers from employers continue to be ignored. Current reintegration strategies place a heavy focus on assisting ex-offenders to improve their own shortcomings and increase their chances to obtain a job. The same attention has not been given to address the concerns held by employers in the context of making hiring decisions about ex-offender job applicants with specific attention given to *why* a criminal record matters within those decision-making processes (cf. Albright & Denq, 1996; Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Holzer et al., 2006b; Lukies et al., 2011; Graffam, et al., 2008; Pager, 2003, 2007; Pager & Quillian, 2005).

My study seeks to remedy this gap by moving beyond the objective factors regarding the ex-offender’s personal, educational and vocational deficits to examine employment for ex-offenders from the employer’s perspective. Employers have been clear in previous studies that offence characteristics (i.e. offence type, offending chronicity, sentence type, and time factors) comprise important considerations (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Fahey et al., 2006; Snider & Reyson, 2014), and ex-offenders’ race also has been shown to differentially influence hiring decisions (Decker, 2014; Pager, 2007; Pager & Western, 2009). These factors are included in my study to enable an examination of why offence characteristics influence employers’ hiring decisions, and also to examine whether the double disadvantage of a criminal record and race also matters to employers in the Australian context.

The aim of my study is three-fold. First, to ascertain what barriers are present for employers, if any, and how these can be alleviated to ultimately improve employment outcomes for ex-offenders. By establishing what else matters to employers in this regard, steps can be taken to formulate strategies to mitigate the additional barriers present for employers that have not yet been identified. Second, to extend the current literature and contribute further insight into why employers will hire some ex-offenders and not others. Third, to provide an in-depth understanding of employers’ perspectives in the Australian context with regard to hiring an ex-offender, as this has not yet been considered to this extent.

A number of interrelated concepts are adopted and brought together to guide my examination. First, I draw on the social psychological model of Impression Formation (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley, Hepburn & Ortiz, 1982) to examine the influence of a criminal record on employers’ hiring decisions about ex-offenders. Impression formation proposes stereotypical beliefs about others coupled with individuating information (i.e. personal attributes unique to an individual) inform the impressions we make about them. In this first step, assessing the intrinsic beliefs employers

hold about ex-offenders, together with ex-offenders' individual-level attributes, could provide one explanation for why employers may or may not be willing to hire job applicants with a criminal record.

Second, I adapt the Impression Formation model to propose an alternative 'Willingness to Hire' model. My Willingness to Hire model differs from the original Impression Formation model in two ways; in this alternative model I replace stereotypes with Maruna and King's (2009) *belief in redeemability* and I replace individuating information with *desistance signals*. Belief in redeemability refers to the extent to which one believes offenders can change and desist from crime. Desistance signals refers to any indicators that employers interpret as signals of an ex-offender's desistance from crime. Here, I also incorporate the signalling timeline (Connelly et al., 2011), which I have adopted from communications literature to assess how an ex-offender's desistance can be effectively signalled to employers.

My research is conducted in accordance with an Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods (ESMM) approach that proceeds across two phases. Phase one comprises a quantitative vignette study, with follow up face to face interviews at phase two. The purpose of an ESMM research design is to establish what relationships of interest exist for the phenomenon under study through quantitative analysis, then provide additional context around these relationships through qualitative analysis. Accordingly, the research questions that follow govern my examination of why employers are willing or not willing to hire an ex-offender, by guiding my mixed methods research approach and subsequent analyses in this thesis:

Quantitative research questions:

1. Does a job applicant's criminal record differentially influence employers' willingness to hire?
2. What factors predict employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record in the Australian context?
3. What is the relationship between belief in redeemability and employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record?
4. What predicts a belief in redeemability?
5. Do signals of desistance influence an employer's willingness to hire?
6. Do signals of desistance influence the association between belief in redeemability and willingness to hire?
7. Does belief in redeemability influence the association between desistance signals and willingness to hire?
8. Do different offence characteristics independently alter employers' willingness to hire?

Qualitative research questions:

9. What do offence characteristics signal about an ex-offender?
10. What characterises the difference between belief in redeemability scores?
11. What do employers perceive the capacity to change depends on?
12. What kind of desistance signals are valuable to employers in their hiring assessments of job applicants with a criminal record?
13. How do employers make sense of desistance signals?

Outline of this Thesis

Even though there is a widespread global decrease in crime rates, harsh sentencing practices are on the rise (Jacobson, Heard & Fair, 2017; Productivity Commission, 2019; Rope & Sheahan, 2018). Consequently, the need for effective reintegration for both custodial and non-custodial sentenced ex-offenders (Farrall, 2004; Graffam et al., 2008; Laub & Sampson, 2001, 2003) has also increased. One of the fundamental aspects required for successful reintegration is employment (Bahr et al., 2010, Graffam, Shinkfield, Lavelle & Hardcastle, 2004a; Graffam et al., 2004b). In this introductory chapter to my thesis, I have established the problem that, despite concerted efforts and strategies currently in place to help ex-offenders obtain employment, employers are still reluctant to hire a job applicant with a criminal record. This raises the possibility that there are other barriers for employers that are impeding the inclusion of ex-offenders in the workforce. By establishing what these barriers are we move a step towards improving employment outcomes for ex-offenders.

This thesis contains seven chapters, including this introduction chapter. In the literature review in Chapter Two that follows, I discuss more explicitly what is currently known about the barriers to employment for ex-offenders and the strategies in place to mitigate these barriers. I then outline in greater detail the Impression Formation model adopted for this thesis. My proposed adaptation of this model—the Willingness to Hire model—is then explained along with the interrelated concepts I adopt for my Willingness to Hire model, pertaining to belief in redeemability, desistance signalling, and the signalling timeline, and how they guide my enquiries for this study. In Chapter Three, I describe the ESMM design of this study, along with my analytical framework which incorporates a variety of statistical and thematic analyses, relevant for responding to my research questions and achieving the aims of this thesis.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are dedicated to the presentation of my results, which are integrated in accordance with ESMM research design and reporting. Each results chapter addresses one main theme relating to this thesis. Chapter Four addresses how and why a criminal record makes a difference to employers' willingness to hire. Analysis of the effect of ex-offenders' race is also included and throughout the following two integrated results chapters. Chapters Five and Six address the influence of belief in redeemability and desistance signals, respectively, as part of the process of

employers formulating their willingness to hire. Finally, Chapter Seven discusses the theoretical and practical implications that emerge from my findings, along with the limitations of this study and associated recommendations for further research. I close this thesis with some concluding remarks about the value of my study and what it has to offer with regards to alleviating the barriers from employers in order to improve the employment prospects and associated reintegration success for ex-offenders.

2. FACTORS INFLUENCING EMPLOYMENT FOR EX-OFFENDERS:

Current Literature and Conceptual Models

“[There are some murderers who] are back out in society and have so much to teach us about rehabilitation, redemption and about really screwing up your life—massively—and then what it takes to come back, what it takes to be a person again and give back to society.

People can change.”

Nancy Mullane, 2012

Author of ‘Life after Murder’

Introduction

An ex-offender’s genuine quest to seek employment is a promising sign that a shift in their mindset to change and desist from crime has taken place (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna & Bushway, 2008). For this reason, being attuned to signals of desistance is important for employers who are faced with an ex-offender job applicant. Yet employers’ continued reluctance to hire ex-offenders because of their criminal records suggests efforts to find work, on the ex-offender’s part, are outweighed by employers’ stigmatising attitudes about the perceived risks posed by job applicants with a criminal record and possibly an inability to identify desistance.

In this chapter, my objective is to establish the point of departure upon which the remainder of this thesis is built. To date, criminological literature has provided strong evidence for the significant association between a wide range of factors that help or hinder employment outcomes for ex-offenders, which I review in this chapter. Yet the enduring unwillingness of employers to hire an ex-offender, even when presenting as favourable candidates, suggests there may be other underlying factors that have not yet been considered. My thesis seeks to address this gap by taking stock of the prospect of hiring an ex-offender from an employer’s perspective and my approach for doing this is also outlined in this chapter. I draw on the Impression Formation model to assess employers’ hiring decisions of ex-offenders, then adapt it to assess whether and how employers’ beliefs about ex-offenders’ redeemability, as well as how employers gauge desistance from crime are instrumental for employers’ willingness to hire.

This chapter is organised in two parts. The first part provides a review of the literature, addressing what is currently known about employers’ decisions to hire job applicants with a criminal record, the barriers to ex-offender employment outcomes and factors that mitigate those barriers. In the second part of this chapter I argue that what is currently known about employers’ willingness to hire can be explained in accordance with the Impression Formation model. Impression Formation proposes the combination of stereotypes and individuating information contribute to

forming impressions about others (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982). My adaptation of this model, the Willingness to Hire model is then outlined along with the two alternative concepts in my employers' Willingness to Hire model; belief in redeemability (Maruna & King, 2009) and desistance signalling (Bushway & Apel, 2012). To examine in greater detail how desistance might be effectively signalled to employers, I also adopt the 'signaling timeline' strategy from communications literature (Connelly et al., 2001) as a third component in my Willingness to Hire model. For the context of this thesis, the signalling timeline is also adapted and renamed the 'desistance signalling timeline'.

PART ONE: Factors that Hinder and Help Ex-offenders Find a Job

Current literature shows employment outcomes for ex-offenders are associated with a range of factors (Metcalf, Anderson & Rolfe, 2001). These factors are largely objective, relating to the socio-demographic characteristics of both the ex-offender and the employer, as well as the organisational context within which an ex-offender job applicant is being considered for employment. Under some hiring considerations, these factors are unfavourable and present as barriers to employment for ex-offenders. However, the picture is complex since evidence also suggests a range of favourable factors, such as work experience or qualifications, that lead to more positive hiring outcomes for ex-offenders (Giguere & Dundas, 2002). Even so, the stigma associated with a criminal record makes it difficult for ex-offenders to secure work (Bushway & Reuter, 2002; Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2006a). Here in part one of this chapter, I simultaneously discuss the socio-demographic, vocational and organisational context factors that hinder and help employment prospects for ex-offenders. I conclude this discussion with a specific focus on criminal record factors that matter to employers, as these apply only to employment outcomes for ex-offenders.

Factors Relevant to Ex-offender Job Applicants: Vocational Deficits and Socio-demographic Characteristics

Employment prospects for ex-offenders are typically limited to low-skilled and low-wage positions (Dale, 1976; Western, 2002) since most have low levels of education, poor vocational skills and little to no work history (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey et al., 2006). Without evidence of vocational skills, such as a trade qualification, or work history, ex-offenders present as weaker prospects to employers, lessening the appeal for their inclusion the workforce (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey et al., 2006). Accordingly, the ability for ex-offenders to compete for jobs is reduced (Brewster & Sharp, 2002) unless these educational and vocational deficits are addressed.

Mitigating these barriers, verification of previous work experience, along with high-level job qualifications, are some of the earlier factors known to increase job prospects for ex-offenders (Finn

& Fontaine, 1983). Consequently, employment readiness and vocational skills training is the sole focus of some re-entry programs. In others it comprises part of a broader focus on socio-structural needs relevant for re-entry (Graffam, Shinkfield & Lavelle, 2014; Heseltine, Day & Sarre, 2011; Redcross, Millenky, Rudd & Levshin, 2012). Re-entry programs focussed on employment have two core emphases - how to do a job and how to behave at work - while in some cases, also facilitating access to employers (Sabol, 2007; Visser et al., 2011; Western, 2007). Typically, these programs work towards assisting offenders to develop hard skills, such as technical abilities that are required for specific occupations, as well as fostering soft skills such as punctuality, reliability and appropriate workplace conduct (Redcross, et al., 2012).

Employment program evaluations have, however, produced mixed findings in terms of employment outcomes and recidivism rates. Some report significant benefits in terms of employment outcomes and reduced recidivism (Duwe, 2012). Others report likewise with regards to recidivism, as well as substantial improvement in employment immediately after program participation, but these effects are not sustained over the longer-term (Redcross et al., 2012). Yet others report no significant effect for employment or recidivism (Farabee et al., 2014). Visser and colleagues' (2005) meta-analysis of thirty-three educational, vocational and work program evaluations in the U.S. reports no significant effect on recidivism. In contrast, Graffam and colleagues' (2014) evaluation of an Australian employment assistance program found significant reductions in reoffending. Visser et al. (2005) acknowledge their findings may be attributable to the methodological limitations in their research. These limitations could account for the discrepancy with Graffam et al.'s. (2014) later report.

Employment outcomes for ex-offenders are also associated with socio-demographic characteristics that alter over the life course, such as age, relationship- and social-status, and the interconnectedness of these (Nagin, Farrington & Moffitt, 1995; Uggen, 2000; Visser et al., 2011). The long-standing agreement amongst some scholars is that desistance from crime is attributable to 'ageing out of crime', which might explain the association between age and employment for ex-offenders (Glueck & Glueck, 1940; Goring, 1913; Moffitt, 1993; Mulvey & LaRosa, 1986). With this in mind, older ex-offenders may be perceived as worthwhile candidates for employment (Shover, 1985; Terry, 2003; Uggen, 2000), although, Visser et al. (2011) found older former prisoners experience poorer employment outcomes after release.

Visser et al. (2011) also report that having debt, being married and being close to one's children are associated with better employment outcomes for ex-offenders, all of which disrupt anti-social peer networks (Giordano, et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 2001, Warr, 1998) and typically occur as one ages (Sampson & Laub, 1993). For social control theorists, this attachment to significant others along with having a stake in conformity provides a protective factor against further offending (Bahr

et. al., 2010; Sampson & Laub, 1997; Steiner et. al., 2012; Uggen, 1999; Uggen & Staff, 2001; Wilson, 1997). A common feature between having debt, being married, family relationships, and employment is that each are susceptible to change. Therefore, the social bonds they afford are open to alteration, which may in turn lessen their protective value against reoffending in the event these bonds are weakened. However, other characteristics relevant to the ex-offender and also reported to influence employment outcomes are more permanent and less amenable to change, such as gender, but especially race (Decker 2014; Decker, Spohn, Ortiz & Hedberg, 2010; Pager, 2007).

Throughout a number of studies that examine hiring decisions about job applicants in general, as well as ex-offender job applicants, what is consistently demonstrated is that race matters (Harrison & Schehr, 2004; Pager, 2003; Pager & Karafin, 2009; Pager & Western, 2009). Previous studies have tested the association between race and employment outcomes, with race being identified by non-Anglo sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004) and accent (Purkiss, et al., 2006). Within these studies, employers report being less willing to hire job applicants perceived as members of a racial minority.

Emerging American research shows the compounding effect between race and a criminal record on employers' hiring decisions (Decker, 2014; Pager, 2007; Pager & Western, 2009; Visser et al., 2011) although these reported effects vary across different studies. In Pager's (2009) audit study, each applicant self-reported their criminal record as part of a job application. Her results show that Anglo-Americans with a criminal record experience better job outcomes than African-Americans with or without a criminal record. Nevertheless, in the absence of a criminal record disclosure the possibility cannot be ignored that employers' stereotypical attitudes about race and criminality are still active (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Oliver & Fonash, 2002; Welch, 2007). In line with this, Blumstein and Nakamura (2009) argue that assumptions about criminality are likely to occur on the basis of racial characteristics and, in turn, increase discrimination by employers (see also Freeman, 2008; Pager, 2009). Although criminal background checks are problematic for the most part, Holzer et al. (2006a) demonstrate an advantage for African-American job applicants with no criminal record, where criminal record checks translate to increased hiring rates. However, those with a criminal record remain some of the most marginalized (Pager, 2009).

In Australia, Borland and Hunter (2000) examined employment rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who had been arrested compared with those who had never been arrested, as a proxy for criminal activity. In their study, Indigeneity accounts for about 15 percent of the difference in employment in favour of non-Indigenous Australians. Although an association between arrests and lower employment prospects is reported, this is more likely to do with the individual offender's inclination towards crime and away from work, rather than the arrest influencing an employer's decision to hire in the same way hiring decisions are influenced by a recorded conviction. Apart from

Borland and Hunter's (2000) study, very little is known in the Australian context about the effect of race on employment outcomes for job applicants who have a criminal record and, as such, forms a point of consideration for this thesis.

Not all studies have reported race as having a detrimental effect on employment for ex-offenders. Contradictory evidence reported in other studies demonstrates the compounding effect of race on hiring outcomes is moderated by other factors. Hodson, Dovidio and Gaertner (2002) found that race has no effect on selection processes when the qualifications of the applicant are clearly identifiable. Varghese et al. (2010) demonstrate that bias in hiring decisions is associated with the presence or absence of a criminal record apart from any decision related to race. Here, work qualifications also alleviate the negative effect of a criminal record, but only for those with misdemeanour charges (Varghese et al., 2010). The authors compare their findings with those of Pager (2009) acknowledging their contradictory findings may be explained by methodological differences.

An additional study by Decker (2014, see also Decker et al., 2010) tested the intersectionality of race and gender on employment outcomes for ex-offenders. In line with Pager and Western (2009), his findings show that African-American male ex-offenders were 125 percent less likely to receive a favourable response to their job applications compared with their Anglo-American ex-offender counterparts. He also found females overall fare better in obtaining work than males, especially white females. Decker (2014) further reports that white female ex-offenders have better employment outcomes than black male or female non-offenders. In slight contradiction, Galgano (2009) replicated Pager's (2007) audit study using female test subjects and found employment outcomes for African-American and Anglo-American female ex-offenders did not significantly differ. It is important to acknowledge that besides their criminal record, female ex-offenders also contend with other barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment such as sole parenting duties (Flower, 2010), unstable/abusive personal relationships (Graffam et al., 2004), ongoing mental health challenges (O'Brien, 2001), and homelessness (Covington, 2003).

By comparison, these studies show race detrimentally affects employment outcomes when the ex-offender is male compared to female. This could be explained by other studies examining racial and gender stereotypes, and expectations about dangerousness, violence and reoffending. Amongst the general population and within the criminal justice system, common stereotypes about African-American and Hispanic males are associated with expectations of violent offending and re-offending behaviour (Carnevale & Stone, 1995; Portillos, 1998; Spohn & Holleran, 2000; Steffensmeier et al., 1998). The same kinds of stigma are not applied to women who are reportedly viewed as less dangerous, less risky and less culpable for their offending owing to the probability of also having been victimised (Steffensmeier et al., 1998). Galgano's (2009) study upholds this supposition with

her findings that a criminal record did not have the same stigmatising effect on employment outcomes for females compared to males, irrespective of race.

Factors Relevant to Employers: Considerations and Organisational Contexts

As part of the process of making hiring decisions, employers consider factors relating to the ex-offender applicant's skills and abilities. Prior research shows that employers take into consideration education levels, vocational qualifications and/or skills, as well as prior work experience, when assessing the employability of ex-offender job applicants (Finn & Fontaine, 1983; Sabol, 2007; Visher et al., 2011). Yet beyond adequate training, education and experience, employers cite concerns about the ex-offenders' ability to work efficiently in light of other problems. For example, employers' hiring decisions may be influenced by the physical and mental health challenges ex-offenders often face, and issues around substance abuse, that might be associated with poor work performance (Holzer et al., 2002; Solomon, et al., 2004). Research shows employers are less favourable towards hiring applicants with a criminal record than applicants from other disadvantage groups, such as welfare recipients, those with a chronic illness or disability, or those with minimal work experience (Graffam, et al., 2012b; Holzer, 1996; Petersilia, 2003; 2005). In fact, the only disadvantaged groups shown to fare worse than ex-offenders in terms of employment outcomes are those with an intellectual disability or mental illness (Graffam et al., 2008).

Intellectual disability or mental illness and offending cannot be held in mutual exclusion from each other. Amongst the population of those with a criminal record within Australia and abroad, mental illness is commonplace (Diamond, Wang, Holzer III, Thomas & Cruser, 2001; Fazel, Hayes, Bartellas, Clerici & Trestman, 2016; Forsythe & Gaffney, 2012). This is supported by evidence of the over-representation of mental illness within prisoner populations, which is not constrained to the Australian context only, but found to be true worldwide (Beaudette & Stewart, 2016; Forsythe & Gaffney, 2012; Hamilton, Schneider, Kane & Jordan, 2015; Prins, 2014; Sirdifield, 2012). The co-occurrence of mental health challenges and offending has implications for employment outcomes for ex-offenders.

A Queensland study found that ex-offenders with a mental illness are significantly more likely to be unemployed than ex-offenders without a mental illness (Cutcher, Degenhardt, Alati & Kinner, 2014). Ex-offenders with dual-diagnoses of mental illness and substance abuse are stigmatised because of their criminal record, as well as their dual diagnosis (Hartwell, 2004), and experience greater exclusion from opportunities for employment than those without a dual diagnosis. Strategies designed to improve employment outcomes for mentally ill ex-offenders are more common than those with dual diagnoses. One promising initiative, *The Citizenship Project*, which aims to reduce recidivism among dually diagnosed ex-offenders through increased community involvement and peer

mentorship, is evaluated as having had some positive effects in assisting the reintegration of this ex-offender cohort into the community (Clayton, O'Connell, Bellamy, Benedict & Rowe, 2013). Although employment is not a primary focus as part of this initiative, it is noted here as one possible approach to reducing the barriers to employment for dually diagnosed ex-offenders.

In addition to factors relevant to the ex-offender, one of the broader areas of consideration for employers contemplating the employment of an ex-offender is the organisational context within which hiring decisions are made. Lukies and colleagues (2011) examined the relationship between organisational context variables including industry size, industry location, industry type and the employer's position within the organisation, and employers' attitudes towards hiring ex-offenders. Out of these four attributes, a positive association was found between industry size and employer attitudes, where employers in large industries demonstrated more favourable attitudes towards hiring ex-offenders over and above employers' personal characteristics. Although the authors do not articulate why industry size matters for ex-offenders' employment, Taylor and Walker (1998) report in their study of employers' attitudes towards hiring older workers within large organisations that reluctance to hire was associated with anticipated problems rather than perceived [in]capabilities. Similarly, prior research shows employers anticipate problems with ex-offenders posing a threat to the safety or security of the employer's business, property, employees or customers, or suggests the ex-offender may reoffend, and that this renders a positive employment outcome for the ex-offender as unlikely (Lukies et al., 2011; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager & Western, 2009).

Due to the perceived anticipated challenges connected with hiring an ex-offender, employers report a number of financial and non-financial incentives that may alleviate these concerns and increase the appeal of hiring ex-offenders (Graffam et al., 2008; Holzer et al., 2003; Pager & Western, 2009; Varghese et al., 2010). Government incentives, such as the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) available in the United States (U.S.), grant tax credits to employers who hire ex-offenders. Another government-funded incentive for employers is the Federal Bonding Program. This particular program provides insurance for employers to cover acts of dishonesty committed by ex-offender employees, and offsets the liability imposed on employers under U.S. laws related to negligent hiring (Federal Bonding Program, 2016).

Although recommended, financial incentives explicitly for ex-offender employment do not exist in Australia (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2012b). The closest incentive program in Australia comparable to the U.S. is the Federal Government's Wage Subsidies program, which offers employers up to \$10,000.00 to subsidise wages as an incentive for hiring hard to employ job seekers, including long-term unemployed or Indigenous persons (Australian Government, n.d.), both of whom are over-represented amongst the Australian current and ex-offender population (Cunneen, 2011; La Macchia, 2016;). Alternatively, Job Services Australia [JSA], an Australian Government service,

seeks to support the needs of both job seekers and employers in the Australian labour market. One of the primary objectives of JSA is to provide employment assistance to the most disadvantaged Australians, by addressing deficits in educational and vocational training to increase their employability appeal (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2012a).

Non-financial incentives reported by employers to increase the appeal of hiring ex-offenders is the availability of support services to both the employer and the ex-offender employee (Graffam et al., 2008; Holzer et al., 2003; Pager & Western, 2009; Varghese et al., 2010). For employers, this support entails guidance on assessing the risk of employing ex-offenders and handling criminal record disclosures. In addition, having a contact support person and the provision of a mentor to personally support the ex-offender would also increase employers' willingness to hire (Haslewood-Pócsik, Brown & Spencer, 2008).

The 'Sentenced to a Job' (STAJ) pre-release employment program in the Northern Territory illustrates the value of non-financial incentives to employers (Northern Territory Government, 2018). Sentenced to a Job connects incarcerated offenders with outside employers to commence employment under Award conditions prior to release. Prisoners must apply to enter the program with successful applicants receiving the support needed to meet their work obligations, such as transport to and from work, provision of protective clothing and accommodation post-release. Employers benefit from being able to purposefully select employees to meet skill demands, and daily attendance requirements of prisoners mean employers have reliable workers. On a more altruistic note, employers have the opportunity to effect change in a prisoner's life for the better (Northern Territory Government, 2018). As part of a recent evaluation of the STAJ program, participating employers enjoyed the workforce stability offered by the program, the reliability of the workers, but more frequently mentioned was the opportunity to contribute in some way to reducing the risk of reoffending by engaging prisoners in the workforce (Wodak & Day, 2017). In a similar vein, employers reporting a previous positive experience hiring ex-offenders express a greater willingness to do so again compared to those with no experience hiring ex-offenders (Haslewood-Pócsik et al., 2008; Graffam et al., 2004; Lukies et al., 2011). Furthermore, maintaining or re-establishing contact with a previous employer can also improve employment outcomes for ex-offenders (Visser et al., 2011).

The incentives employers identify as positively influencing their willingness to hire an ex-offender highlights how the concerns relating to employing ex-offenders may be alleviated. Without explicit incentives for hiring applicants with a criminal record or strategies in place to alleviate concerns, employers may remain unmotivated to hire ex-offenders. Yet, the overall success of employment outcomes for ex-offenders does not rely on the provision of incentives alone, but rather, on the balance of both favourable and unfavourable factors taken into consideration by employers.

When considering the myriad of competing factors that contribute to the employment of job applicants with a criminal history, it is no surprise that ex-offenders experience a great deal of difficulty in finding a job. Notably, the majority of factors known to influence employment prospects for ex-offender applicants can be unchangeable and/or determined subjectively by employers, such as the applicant's age or race, previous work history, limited education, or the organizational context in which they are seeking employment. Due to the static or historical nature of many of these features, few are within the scope of the ex-offender to effect change, yet each adversely affect their job prospects. Whilst research indicates that employment outcomes for ex-offenders improve under some conditions, having a criminal record still remains a major barrier to obtaining a job over and above all other factors (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey et al., 2006; Holzer et al., 2004; Lukies et al., 2011; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager & Western, 2009; Varghese, et al., 2010), which means ex-offenders continue to be marginalized and in large part excluded from the labour market (Howard, 2013).

The Case of the Criminal Record: The Additional Employment Barrier Unique to Ex-offender Populations

The fact that, in general, employers remain unwilling to hire an ex-offender, despite favourable conditions that may otherwise increase their willingness to hire, suggests characteristics relating to the ex-offender's criminal history are central to hiring decisions (Holzer et al., 2003). Over and above the usual hiring considerations regarding the appropriateness of a job candidate for a specific position, research has shown that a central concern for employers considering an ex-offender job applicant are the characteristics associated with his or her criminal history (Holzer et al., 2004; Snider & Reyson, 2014, Varghese, et al., 2010). Most notably, prior research shows the type and severity of the crime committed by the ex-offender is associated with employers being demonstrably less willing to hire more serious offenders (Albright & Denq, 1996; Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Snider & Reyson, 2014). Evidence also suggests that for ex-offenders who served a custodial sentence, the length of their time in prison impacts upon job skill maintenance, work habits, and currency with technological advances, while also decreasing the ability to establish job contacts (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999). For some employers, the length of time spent incarcerated also serves as an indication as to the seriousness of the crime committed (Giguere & Dundas, 2002).

Offending chronicity, or having multiple vs a single conviction, is detrimental to job prospects where employment chances for ex-offenders with multiple convictions are significantly reduced compared to those with only a single conviction (Graffam et al., 2008). Employers have also been shown to identify various time-related factors as being part of their considerations. These include the length of time spent in prison (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Western, Kling & Weiman, 2001) and/or the length of time since the ex-offender's most recent offence or release from prison for those who served a custodial sentence (Fahey, et al., 2006; Holzer et al., 2004; Kurlychek et al., 2006).

In some cases, employers report that a longer period of offence-free time is favourable when considering an ex-offender job applicant. Rather than concentrating on the conviction recorded, employers report being more interested in how the ex-offender applicant has used his or her time since. Providing no further offending has occurred, time-lapses can serve as an indicator of change (Fahey et al., 2006; Holzer et al., 2004; Kurlychek et al., 2006). Employers evidently view longer time-lapses to be more convincing indications of criminal desistance, even for ex-offenders with serious convictions. In turn, the ex-offender's conviction as part of the employer's hiring consideration becomes less significant (Metcalf et al., 2001). Perhaps this evidence, collected in response to hypothetical scenarios, is more accurate of what employers think they may do rather than what they actually do since evidence from applied contexts paints a different picture (Pager & Quillian, 2005).

This is illustrated in the case of Raymond Lunn, who was convicted of attempted robbery with an imitation firearm, as featured in *The Road from Crime* film (Devlin, 2012). After his release from prison he completed a college degree, yet over the eight years of disclosing his criminal conviction to employers during the process of job interviews, not a single job offer was made to him (for a further example see Blumstein & Nakamura, 2012). Towards the end of his interview, Lunn (Devlin, 2012) comments that what scares him about being continually knocked back for jobs is that "at some point there might be a breaking point" (32:40), highlighting the fact that employers really do sit at the intersection of breaking vs turning point and that their hiring decisions may well be the catalyst for ex-offenders to go one way or the other. Lunn's example is not an isolated case as there is strong empirical evidence in criminological literature to challenge the supposition that a period of offence-free time favourably influences employers' hiring decisions. Foremost, is the propensity among employers to deny employment to ex-offenders on account of having a criminal record alone without any consideration given to other contextual factors like the length of time since his or her offence (Farrell, 2012; Heydon & Naylor, 2018; Pager, 2003). Ongoing exclusion of ex-offenders from the labour market has even been referred to as a life sentence, due to prolonged punishment by way of social exclusion long after the criminal justice sanction has expired (Flake, 2015).

Beyond identifying the specific offence characteristics important to employers in their hiring decisions, little is known about why these characteristics matter. Employers' persistent unwillingness to hire an ex-offender tends to be motivated by stigmatising attitudes grounded in stereotypical beliefs about the perceived risks associated with hiring an ex-offender, rather than whether he or she is capable of fulfilling the requirements of the available position (Finlay, 2008; Homant & Kennedy, 1982; Ishmaru, 2008; Pager, 2006; Quillian & Pager, 2010). In this regard, offence characteristics differentially affect the extent of the associated stigma. For instance, the stigma associated with a term of imprisonment is perceived as more severe than a non-custodial sentence (Albright & Denq,

1996; Giguere & Dundas, 2002; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Subsequently, for risk averse employers, criminal background checks are viewed as favourable (Pager, 2006).

Under the Australian Human Rights Commission Act (1986), the use of criminal background checks is regulated to minimize discriminatory hiring practices on the one hand, while on the other, permitted to preclude some ex-offenders for employment in particular occupational sectors (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2012a, 2012b; Naylor, Paterson & Pittard, 2008). Analogous with legislation in other Western countries such as the U.S., U.K., Canada, and New Zealand (Canadian Human Rights Act, 1977; Civil Rights Act, 1964; Human Rights Act, 1993; Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, 1974), employers are legally obligated to discriminate against ex-offender applicants in the context of work with children and vulnerable groups, or in specially licensed industries such as the legal profession, security, or criminal justice agencies (AHRC, 2012b; Burton, Cullen & Travis III, 1987; Bushway, 2004; Harris & Keller, 2005; Legal Action Center, 2004).

Outside mandatory criminal checks within specified sectors, Australian guidelines state these checks should only be done to ensure there is no connection between the ‘inherent requirements’ of a job and a criminal record. ‘Inherent requirements’, however, are not clearly defined by the AHRC (2012b). This leaves room for employers to justify unfair discrimination against ex-offenders based on claims regarding the applicant’s inability to fulfil the, albeit ambiguous, inherent requirements of a job (AHRC, 2012b). Regulating the use of this information to protect ex-offenders against unjustifiable discrimination is where the challenge lies (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004; Lam & Harcourt, 2003). Adding to the challenge, employers are able to conduct criminal history searches from their own computers, which increases the visibility of an ex-offender’s past (Ispa-Landa & Loeffler, 2016; Sweeney, 2013). Furthermore, criminal record checks are also no longer constrained to a national level with the development of global criminal record check initiatives now available (CBS: The Screening House, 2018; Checkback International, 2018; Equifax, 2018; Plan to Protect, 2018; Verified Credentials Inc., 2018).

Due to the ease of obtaining criminal history information, conducting official criminal background checks has increased dramatically across most English-speaking countries since the 1990s (Naylor, 2012). In the U.S., Stoll and Bushway (2008) report 44 percent of employers in their sample conduct criminal background checks, indicating a 12 percent increase in criminal background checking practices since 1992-94. In the Australian context, criminal record checks almost tripled from 1.7 million during the 2005-06 year (CrimTrac, 2007 cited in Naylor et al., 2008) to 4.75 million during the 2016-17 year (Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, 2017). During this same period of time (i.e. 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2017), the national rate of employment remained stable with only mild fluctuations, ranging between 60.5 percent to just under 63 percent (Trading

Economics, 2018).

In the U.S., the impetus for this growing trend of increased criminal background checks centres around employers' concerns about liability for negligent hiring. Negligent hiring laws allow employers to be held liable when criminal behaviour is perpetrated by an employee with a criminal record (Bushway, 2004). In Australia, where negligent hiring laws are non-existent, increased criminal background checks are reported to be undertaken by employers as an exercise in maintaining the safety and security of their business and those associated with it (Lam & Harcourt, 2003).

The problem with criminal records is that the information provided can often be misleading, thereby invoking insinuations that an applicant's criminal past was far more serious than was the reality (Naylor, 2012). Naylor (2012) uses the example of travelling by train without a ticket which attracts an offence description of "obtaining a financial advantage by deception" (2012:116). Whilst this offence does fall under the category of fraudulent activity, in this instance the offence is minor, yet the severity (or lack thereof) of the crime cannot be ascertained by the registered offence description. Without further enquiry or additional contextual information, the employer risks making erroneous assumptions about the offence committed which may also lead to inaccurate perceptions about the ex-offender's employability and discourage employers from providing job opportunities to ex-offenders (Finn & Fontaine, 1985; Pager, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen, Thomson & Manza, 2006; Western, 2006).

To reduce employer bias, Henry and Jacobs (2007) recommend access to criminal records be restricted, following their evaluation of initiatives such as Ban-the-Box campaigns, a movement that aims to have questions about criminal records removed from job applications (All of Us or None, 2004). By doing so, employers judge the employability of ex-offender job applicants by their own merit without the negative influence of the criminal record. At the same time, by utilising criminal history information in the process of hiring decisions, employers are merely exercising their rights to protect their business interests (Lam & Harcourt, 2003). The challenge, then, for prospective employers is to strike the balance between utilizing criminal record information, exercising their own rights and protecting the rights of others, while at the same time negotiating their evaluation of the ex-offender applicant within the jurisdictions of anti-discrimination legislation (Leavitt, 2002).

Compared to other hard to employ groups, having a criminal record differentiates ex-offenders as having unique disadvantages to obtaining employment that others do not encounter. Stoll (2009:382) cites that "a criminal record may signal an untrustworthy or otherwise problematic employee". This raises further questions about what else matters in the context of employers' hiring decisions where ex-offenders are concerned. Bushway (2004) accentuates this, arguing that an ex-offender's potential for desistance can be misrepresented or overshadowed by his or her criminal record. He asserts, "[p]erhaps if more is learned about the process by which people desist, employers

and workforce agents can be more discriminating when they make use of information in the criminal history record” (Bushway, 2004:281).

Understanding Desistance from Crime: Defining and Examining the Correlates of Desistance from Crime

Desistance from crime is defined as a process rather than an isolated event, which may eventually lead to the cessation of criminal offending (Fagan, 1989; Laub & Sampson, 2001, 2003). Consistent with this proposition, Blumstein and Nakamura (2009) provide evidence that, over time, the risk of reoffending for those who have a criminal past eventually matches those who have never engaged in offending behaviour. The time lapse for offenders to achieve equal recidivism risk as their non-offending counterparts differs by age at most recent offence, with younger offenders requiring a longer time period. The same is also true for violent offenders as opposed to property offenders. Nevertheless, Blumstein and Nakamura (2009) argue that a time lapse characterized by no further offending serves as a mark of redemption for ex-offenders (see also Bushway et al., 2011).

Being the ultimate outcome that characterises successful reintegration, desistance is not achieved autonomously by the individual ex-offender (Farrall, Bottoms & Shapland, 2010). Overall, scholars propose desistance from crime depends on two key elements, both independent from and in conjunction with each other (LeBel et al., 2008): first, subjective conditions relevant to the ex-offender; second, inclusion in social institutes. Recent literature supports the idea that successful reintegration and associated desistance from crime relies upon a reciprocal approach by ex-offenders and relevant service providers or community stakeholders, such as employers (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2012b; LaVigne et al., 2004; Owers Report, 2011), as well as “strong community support networks” (Visser & Travis, 2011:111). First and foremost, desistance from crime depends upon the subjective condition of the individual ex-offender’s decision to change (Bushway & Apel, 2012; Healy, 2013; Terry, 2003).

Additional subjective conditions contributing to desistance from crime include increasing age (Moffit, 1993) as well as conditions precipitated by ex-offenders such as the rational choice to desist from crime (Cromwell, Olson & Avary, 1989; Cohen & Ezell, 2005; Glueck & Glueck, 1937; Moffit, 1993; Shover, 1983), and the impetus to achieve goals (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Also, desistance from crime occurs by way of the ex-offender developing a new identity of the self as a desister (Maruna, 2001), along with a complete reformation of the way ex-offenders view themselves and offending behaviour (Giordano et al., 2002). Bottoms and Shapland (2011, 2016) offer a further perspective that desistance from crime is precipitated by some type of catalyst which results in the offender wanting to change. For a long time, literature around desistance from crime has typically placed the ex-offender at the centre of this process, and while personal attitudes and beliefs are in part

instrumental for desistance and the extent of reintegration success (La Vigne et al., 2004), participating in conventional society is also important.

Scholars of desistance studies persistently demonstrate how social institutes such as having a stable job, marriage, military service, parenthood, pro-social networks, and residential change contribute to lower risks of reoffending and reinforce desistance from crime (Bahr et al., 2010; Bersani, Laub & Nieuwbeerta, 2009; Caspi & Moffitt, 1993; Craig & Foster, 2011; Kirk, 2012; Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014). Desistance narratives consistently emphasise how these life events and opportunities create a ‘turning point’ for the ex-offender to ‘knife off’ or break away from his or her criminal past and move towards desistance from crime (Carlsson, 2012; Hughes, 1998; Kirk, 2012; Laub & Sampson, 2001, 2003; Uggen, 2000). Through these social institutes ex-offenders establish much needed support networks (Sampson & Laub, 2003) and are provided with routine structures, which in turn encourage desistance from crime (Uggen & Staff, 2001). Social bonds theorists argue that networks and structures of this kind provide the ex-offender with a stake in conformity whereby desistance is promoted because the ex-offender has decreased opportunities to engage in further offending, and has too much to lose by doing so (Davis et al., 2012; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Sampson & Laub, 1993). In line with these perspectives and in specific relation to employment, Sampson and Laub (1993) propose that employment on its own does not necessarily promote desistance, but rather, aspects related to employment such as “job stability, commitment to work, and mutual ties binding workers and employers” (1993:146).

Opportunities for engaging in social institutes does, however, depend on a mutual exchange between the ex-offender and relevant others (Farrall et al., 2010). As suggested by Farrall and colleagues (2010), the centrality of this conjunction being crucial for reintegration and promoting desistance is made evident where ex-offenders have been successful in their employment endeavours, attributing their own desistance from crime as being associated with having a job (Maruna, 2001; Uggen, Wakefield & Western, 2005). In these instances, the motivation to work is important, but not sufficient alone for ex-offenders to obtain work. The relevant conditions for social inclusion, being an employer with a suitable job and a willingness to hire, must also be present. It is the coalescence of these subjective and social factors that facilitates employment opportunities.

This renders the employer a very important stakeholder in the reintegration of ex-offenders and associated desistance and, as such, supports the motivation for this research to examine what else matters to employers when considering a job applicant with an offending history. Not yet examined is what might be instrumental in the process by which employers determine their willingness to hire an ex-offender. In particular, the beliefs employers hold regarding the capacity for ex-offenders to change and desist from crime, and whether these beliefs govern the hiring decisions employers make

as suggested by social psychologists (Postmus et al., 2011), along with the signals employers look for to identify desistance. Consequently, I turn the spotlight away from ex-offenders towards employers to investigate how and why a criminal record matters for employers' willingness to hire.

PART TWO: Employers' Willingness to Hire Model - An Adaptation of Impression Formation

My examination of employers' beliefs *about* ex-offenders in connection with recognising desistance signalled *by* ex-offenders is guided by the social psychological Impression Formation model. This model comprises two key components that contribute to the formation of impressions about others. These are 'stereotypes' and 'individuating information' (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982). Stereotyping is a process by which others are socially categorised on the basis of objective indicators such as their perceived race, age, gender, or a criminal record (Bodenhausen, 2005), which then forms the expectations and beliefs held about members belonging to those social categories (Sherman, Stroessner, Conrey & Azam, 2005). A long-standing agreement among psychologists is that stereotypical beliefs about others are automatically activated (Cunningham, Preacher, & Banaji, 2001; Bargh, 1999; Devine, 1989; Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983) as soon as an individual's stigmatizing characteristics are made apparent (Blair, Judd & Fallman, 2004; da Silva & Lima, 2016; Devine, 1989; Tajfel, 1981). Since criminal records require disclosure, the activation of associated stereotypes can be delayed (St. Helene-Uko, 2017), unlike other personal attributes like race, age or gender which are readily identifiable by physical features.

As it functions, we define and treat others in accordance with their assigned stereotype, and in the same or similar way as others who might also fit into the same social category. This could present as problematic though since stereotypical impressions formed about others, along with associated responses, are then based on generalised and broad perceptions informed by categorical information. What is overlooked are attributes that are unique to the individual that differentiates them from others in their shared social category (Bodenhausen, 2005). When individuals exhibit characteristics that set them apart from others in their group, the generalised group beliefs are less likely to apply to that individual (Livingston & Brewer, 2002; Macrae, Mitchell & Pendry, 2002). Until more recently, the common conjecture was that beliefs about others were reasonably fixed and not inclined to change (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton & Williams, 1995) however, newer research suggests that in the presence of individuating information that runs counter to stereotypes, beliefs are susceptible to malleability (Blair, Ma & Lenton, 2001; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001).

Individuating information is the particular knowledge relevant to the individual, outside of or in addition to the generalised attributes by which they come to be stereotyped. It encompasses the individual-level characteristics that render them unique (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). Such

characteristics might include their personality, behaviour, appearance, abilities or even hobbies (Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993; Ziegler & Burger, 2011). The upshot of individuating information is the potential for individuals to be simultaneously ascribed to more than one social category and lead to impressions about the individual person beyond broad and generalised stereotypes (Bodenhausen, 2005). The suggestion here is not that individuating information outweighs stereotypes or vice versa. Even social psychologists maintain contrasting views as to how the process of impression formation unfolds. There is, however, a general consensus that one's impression of another is formed by integrating both stereotypes and individuating information (Asch, 1946; Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Holyoak & Spelman, 1993; Kunda & Thagard, 1996). Nevertheless, the combination of individuating information and stereotypes can lead to one of two outcomes in the context of impression formation where individuating information: 1) amplifies and reinforces the influence of stereotypes on the formation of impressions; or 2) attenuates and alters the influence of stereotypes on the formation of impressions (Blair, 2002).

Public opinion studies demonstrate the amplification effect of personal features on automatically activated stereotypes about offenders. For instance, studies of public perceptions suggest stereotypes about being a violent offender are amplified when offenders are young males, bearing appearances that make them look like a criminal (Bull, 1982; Bull & Green 1980; Dumas & Testé, 2006; Jones & Kaplan, 2003; MacLin & Herrera, 2006). Studies around race and crime stereotypes report a reciprocal relationship where criminality is associated with race and certain racial categories are stereotyped as criminals (Neimann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter & Sullivan, 1994). For instance, Qullian and Pager (2010) point out the stereotype amplification effect of race associated with exaggerated perceptions of crime salience, along with perceptions that African-Americans are prone to violent offending (Devine, 1989; Smith, 1991). Race also amplifies stereotypes about offender type (Sunnafrank & Fontes, 1983), where sexual offences are perceived to be committed by White offenders, whereas auto theft and assault are seen to be committed by Black offenders (Hurwitz & Peffley, 1997). Australian studies depict a similar scenario, although they also incorporate an emphasis on religion, particularly in relation to Muslim immigrants amplifying stereotypes associated with an increased fear of extreme violence and terrorism (Poynting & Perry, 2007; Warner, 2004). Correll, Park, Judd and Wittenbrink (2007) confirmed the amplification effect of racial stereotypes in their study of decisions to shoot a Black vs White target. By using stereotype-congruent individuating information to reinforce perceptions about Blacks and dangerousness, Correll and colleagues (2007) found shoot responses increased. The same bias did not occur for White targets to whom stereotypes about dangerousness are not applied.

The opposite effect occurs when counter-stereotypic individuating information is made available. Pedulla (2014) demonstrated this counteractive effect on negative stereotypes in the context of employment outcomes for black gay men. Stereotypically, black men are perceived as violent and

criminal (Moss & Tilly, 2001; Pager & Karafin, 2009) and gay men perceived as effeminate, weak and sensitive (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993; Madon, 1997). Being associated with one or the other of these two stigmatized groups is known to be associated with discrimination in the labour market. Yet Pedulla (2014) found that identifying as both black and gay, counteracted the dominant stereotypes held about either of these characteristics independently, and subsequently improved employment outcomes.

In the context of this thesis, I adopt the Impression Formation model and apply it to examine why a criminal record matters to employers and their willingness to hire an ex-offender. Criminological literature to date is clear that the stereotypical beliefs employers hold about the risks ex-offender job applicants pose (Finlay, 2008; Homant & Kennedy, 1982; Ishmaru, 2008; Pager, 2006; Quillian & Pager, 2010) and the amplifying effect of their offence characteristics, leads employers to form poor impressions about ex-offenders as potentially valueable employees (Albright & Denq, 1996; Giguere & Dundas, 2002; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Even so, the emphasis here on perceived risks in association with historical offence characteristics or objective physical features, such as the ex-offender's race has provided us to date with a one-sided view of employers' willingness to hire. What I am suggesting is that there is more to the story about why a criminal record matters to employers.

Given the overall aim of this research is to examine what else matters for employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender job applicant, beyond their criminal record, I propose an alternative perspective where employers' beliefs about the capacity for ex-offenders to desist from crime, combined with ex-offenders' individual-level indications of desistance, will influence employers' willingness to hire. To test this proposition, I apply my adapted Willingness to Hire model and discuss first my replacement of stereotypes with belief in redeemability.

By comparison, a belief in redeemability is first and foremost a generalised belief about whether ex-offenders, as a socially categorised collective of individuals, can change and desist from crime (Maruna & King, 2009), not unlike stereotypes being generalised beliefs. However, the way in which this belief can be applied from one ex-offender to the next is likely to also depend upon additional and specific information about the individual. Given the evidence to date that indicates stereotypical beliefs and attitudes are not fixed, but are alterable (Blair, Ma & Lenton, 2001; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Hough & Park, 2002), this is critical to also examine in relation to employers' hiring decisions about ex-offenders and whether beliefs about redeemability are also malleable.

For the purposes of this study, I propose additional counter-stereotypic information which signals an ex-offender as a desister from crime will either amplify or attenuate employers' generalised beliefs about the capacity for ex-offenders to change. As discussed earlier, impression formation involves this second component relating to individual-level factors referred to as individuating

information, which I argue will be integral to employers for their willingness to hire and therefore should not be ignored. It is therefore a further aim in this study to examine whether a willingness to hire will fluctuate from one ex-offender depending on how an ex-offender's desistance from crime is demonstrably signalled to employers. Accordingly, I replace individuating information with desistance signals and incorporate my adapted Desistance Signalling Timeline in my Willingness to Hire model. Figure 2.1 below depicts my proposed Willingness to Hire model, illustrating the relationships being examined in this thesis.

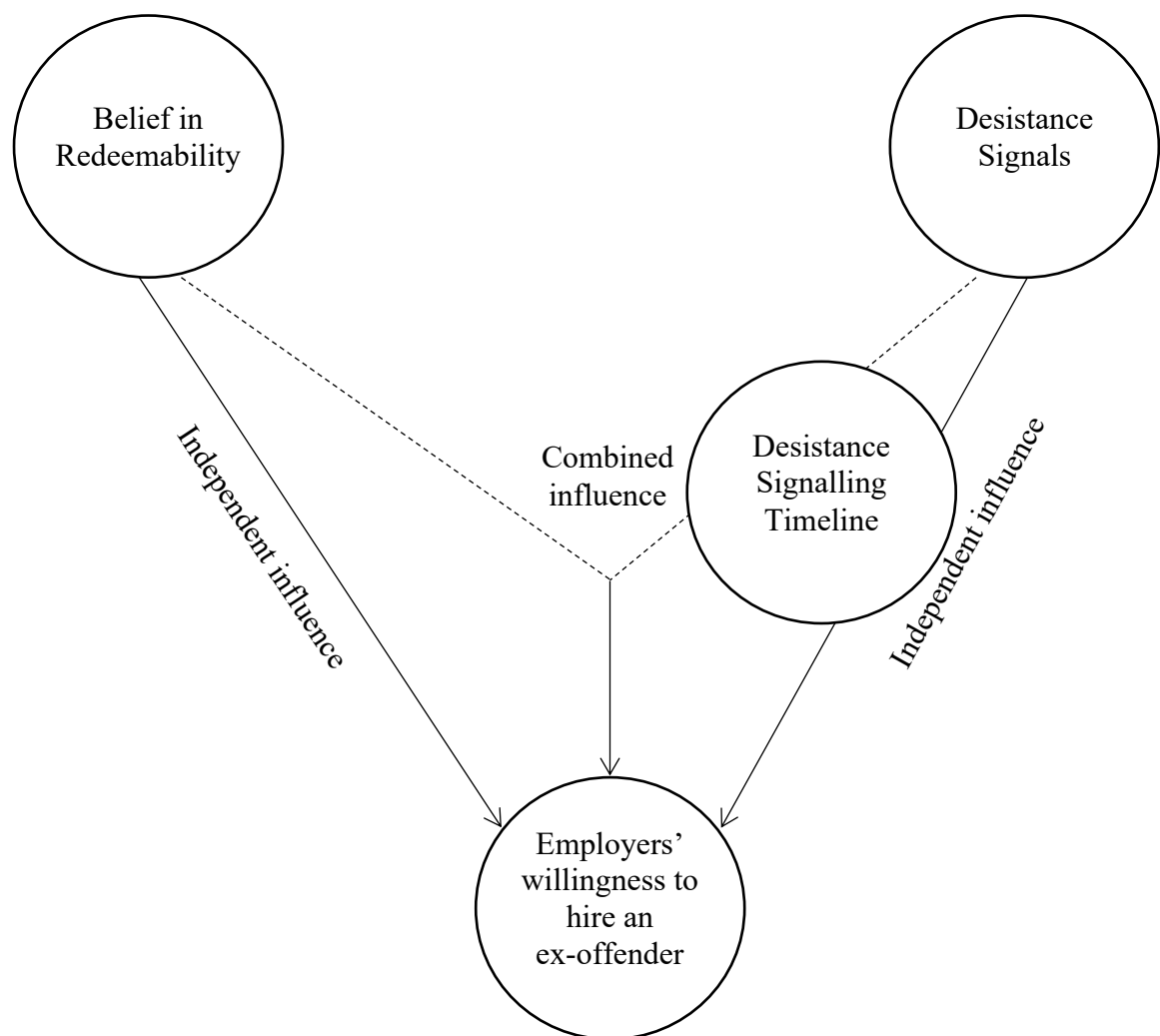


Figure 2.1 Employers' Willingness to Hire model

Comprising the two main components of my employers' Willingness to Hire model the final part of this chapter explains belief in redeemability and desistance signalling, and outlines the value of drawing on both for the purposes of this thesis. To begin, I outline how belief in redeemability (Maruna & King, 2009) is defined and measured and its application to explain public punitiveness.

Following this, I explain the current propositions concerning desistance signalling (Bushway & Apel, 2012) and draw further on the signalling timeline model from communications literature (Connelly et al., 2011) to propose how ex-offenders' desistance from crime might be signalled to employers in recognisable ways.

Belief in Redeemability

Maruna and King (2009) demonstrate how differential beliefs about the capacity for human nature to change predict variations in attitudes towards others, specifically offenders. Similarly, the extent to which employers are willing to hire ex-offenders may also be explained by beliefs about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime. On one hand, prior research shows that a criminal record matters to employers when making hiring decisions about ex-offenders. On the other hand, this might have less to do with aspects of the ex-offender's criminal history and more to do with whether these aspects differentially influence what employers believe about an offender's capacity to change. My study adds to the current body of literature by first examining employers' beliefs about offenders' redeemability and the direct relationship between these beliefs and their willingness to hire.

Redemption, as a concept, is connected with the idea of forgiveness and emancipation from a life of crime and criminal identity (Blumstein & Nakamura, 2009). Blumstein and Nakamura define redemption as the process of "going straight" (2009:328), where living a changed life serves as proof to society of the ex-offender's redemption. However, redemption is a two-way street that also requires others to perceive change has occurred and allow the ex-offender to engage in civic society again by way of providing opportunities such as employment (Moses, 2014). Whilst redemption ultimately relies on others to perceive change and accept the ex-offender back into the fold, belief in redeemability relates to the perceptions others hold about whether that change is possible. Belief in redeemability does not inherently depend on whether an ex-offender's redemption has occurred. In fact, redemption by way of affording ex-offenders a second chance to reintegrate, like being given a job, can occur irrespective of whether one believes in change or not (Charles Koch Institute, 2018). By the same token, whether one believes an offender is redeemable has no bearing on the objective reality that change is possible, since many offenders have made efforts to redeem themselves despite the beliefs of others (see for example Lavigueur, 2018; Leung, 2018; Munro, 2018).

The belief in redeemability thesis, proposed by Maruna and King (2009), considers the perceived malleability of human nature in relation to attitudes about others. In the context of criminality, belief in redeemability refers to one's beliefs about whether an offender's propensity for criminal behaviour is fixed or whether an offender can change and desist from crime, despite the extent or severity of his or her criminal background. Belief in redeemability offers an alternative

perspective to the attribution-style explanations of crime proposed by Heider (1958) and later Cullen, Clark, Cullen, and Mathers (1985).

Attribution-style explanations of crime incorporate two perspectives. The first suggests that crime occurs because humans are rational and those who possess an inherent proclivity to offend calculate their decision to do so based on a cost-benefit analysis. This is referred to as a dispositional (Heider, 1958) or classical (Cullen et al., 1985) attribution style. On the flip side, offending occurs not so much because of who the offender is, but due to social circumstances. From this perspective, offending is the result of external social pressures, referred to as a situational (Heider, 1958) or a positivist (Cullen et al., 1985) explanation.

In his critique of attributional explanations of crime, Garland (2001:185) argues that it does not matter whether classical or positivist reasons are given for behaviour if the outcome is the same (i.e. crime). In line with this, Maruna and King (2009) suggest that regardless of whether one attributes classical or positivist explanations of crime, the extent to which we believe human behaviour is mutable rather than fixed may be of equal or perhaps even greater importance (Maruna & King, 2004). It is well documented in psychological literature and demonstrated in many cross-disciplinary studies that core beliefs about others influence our attitudes, intentions or behaviour towards them (see for example Bulgurcu, Cavusoglu & Benbasat, 2010; Forward, 2009; Horvath, Lewis & Watson, 2012; Joshi, Beckett & Macfarlane, 1994; Postmus et al., 2011; Scior, 2011; Teunissen & Bok, 2013; Vinkenburgh, van Engen, Eagly, & Johanssen-Schmidt, 2011; Walsh, White, Hyde, & Watson, 2008). This association between beliefs and responses has been widely researched within the theoretical framework of attribution theory.

As an alternative to attribution-style explanations of crime, belief in redeemability is a general set of beliefs about whether or not offenders can change and stop offending. Belief in redeemability is represented along a continuum of beliefs about the stability of criminality, ranging from being unchangeable at one end of the continuum (i.e., “largely set in stone”) to entirely changeable at the other end (i.e., “even the worst offender can change his or her ways”) (Maruna & King, 2009:12). To empirically test this proposition, Maruna & King (2009) measured whether a belief in redeemability was a better predictor of variations in public punitive attitudes than attribution-style explanations of crime.

Employing data from the Cambridge University Public Opinion Project (CUPOP) Maruna and King’s (2009) analysis controlled for socio-demographic characteristics including class background, gender, education and income, as well as three additional scales measuring victimisation, fear of crime and crime salience – a measure of the perceived seriousness of crime as a local problem (Maruna & King, 2009). The results of their analyses showed belief in redeemability accounted for 14 percent of the variation in individual differences in punitiveness. Overall, dispositional attributions

of crime (i.e. offenders are inherently criminogenic) remained a significant predictor of punitiveness. However, over and above dispositional attributions (as well as fear of crime), belief in redeemability is found to have a strong negative effect on punitiveness. Maruna and King's (2009) study demonstrates that variations in public punitive attitudes are better predicted by beliefs about whether offenders can change and desist from crime (belief in redeemability) rather than beliefs about why crime occurs in the first place (attribution-style explanations of crime). Support for the predictive value of belief in redeemability on public attitudes in favour of offender re-entry has also been found in similar studies in South Carolina (Ouellette, Applegate, & Vuk, 2017), and Australia (O'Sullivan, Holderness, Hong, Bright, & Kemp, 2017). A further Australian study also demonstrates the predictive value of belief in redeemability in relation to public attitudes towards parole (Dodd, 2018). Other studies have also examined predictors of belief in redeemability as it relates to sex offenders (Pryboda, 2015), and the context of beliefs being shaped by neighbourhood- and individual- level factors (Leverentz, 2011).

What appears to be emphasised among these studies is the predictive value of belief in redeemability on attitudes at the broader societal level, where there is likely to be minimal, if any, impact on factors important for offender reintegration, such as getting a job. This leaves the question open as to whether variations detected at the individual-level amongst employers in their willingness to hire has less to do with the objective attributes featured within the ex-offender's criminal history and more to do with employers' subjective positions regarding the extent to which they believe offenders can change and desist from crime. Belief in redeemability provides one possible way this supposition can be tested. It is anticipated that belief in redeemability operates in a similar way to stereotypes, given the manner in which stereotypes function as pre-established beliefs about members of specific social categories (Devine, 1989). Comparably, generalised beliefs about whether offenders can change and desist from crime are most likely to also be preconceived and not reliant upon the employer's interaction with an individual ex-offender.

If beliefs about offenders' capacity to change are instrumental in hiring outcomes, the challenge for ex-offenders is to indicate in tangible ways that they have indeed changed. In his book *Making Good*, Maruna (2001) argues that it is not enough for the ex-offender to simply renounce his or her criminal past for others to believe that change has occurred. There must be some evidence to demonstrate change. Literature provides support for this as it relates to hiring decisions, where employers rely on signals to inform their beliefs about the general employability of job applicants (Bailly, 2008). On this basis, signals that indicate desistance from crime demonstrating the ex-offender has changed may well mean the difference between employers deciding to hire an ex-offender or not hire an ex-offender. Establishing whether and how belief in redeemability matters for employers' willingness to hire lays the foundation for formulating tactics by which desisting offenders may flag their desistance from crime to prospective employers in demonstrable ways.

Desistance Signalling

Desistance signalling originates from signalling theory in labour economics literature, referring to behaviours adopted by job applicants to indicate their value as a potential employee to prospective employers (Spence, 1973). It also encompasses employers' reliance on a prospective employee's observable characteristics and attributes to ascertain intangible qualities that are valued by the employer, such as the job applicant's productivity (Spence, 1973). From this perspective, signals are defined as mutable attributes that can be altered by the individual, such as education. Instrumentally, signals then communicate information that is latent, or otherwise unobservable (Spence, 1973)

More recently, the concept of desistance signalling has emerged in criminological literature as a means by which an ex-offender signals his or her desistance to others (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Desistance signalling is described by Bushway and Apel (2012) as real time behaviours that "flag individuals who possess characteristics that are, fundamentally, unobservable" (2012:30). Analogous with Spence's (1973) ideas, desistance is not explicitly identifiable in a tangible way (Bushway & Reuter, 2002), but relies on observable indicators to represent an ex-offender is no longer engaged in criminal activity. This is potentially problematic for ex-offenders since Stoll (2009) notes a that criminal record may signal something undesirable about an ex-offender that reduces employers' willingness to hire.

Contribution to the desistance signalling supposition is also made from a labelling theory perspective (Becker, 1963; Erikson, 1962). Labelling theory argues that once labelled a 'deviant', an offender internalises this label and behaves in accordance with the label. The label is bestowed similarly to a credential, where the credential denotes both behaviour and identity. To illustrate, Maruna (2012) compares this with completing a PhD. The credential in this case demonstrates something one has achieved, yet upon conferral signals a new identity, 'doctor'. In the same way, the conferral of a criminal record is not just an indication of past behaviour but also renders the individual with the identity, 'offender'.

These labels or credentials extend beyond an indication of past behaviour to provide an enduring signal of *who* the person is, because of *what* they have done. Pager (2003) similarly argues that a criminal record signals a certain negative credential by which ex-offenders may be assessed and classified, a disqualification *per se*. Maruna (2011) suggests that a formal process by which the ex-offender might be re-labelled as no longer deviant may provide an effective means for the ex-offender to signal his or her desistance. This formally recognised new identity then counteracts the stigmatising old identity associated with having a criminal record (Maruna, 2001, 2011). To reinforce this identity transformation, a formal body of authority may provide evidence of rehabilitation (Love, 2003) such as a "letter of recommendation" (Lucken & Ponte, 2008:56). The issue with this, Maruna

(2014) argues, is that few people trust the opinion of experts who make judgments about who is deemed rehabilitated.

Desistance signalling is described in the literature as involving two closely related features. These are 'the what', which is concerned with the intangible qualities that signal desistance, and 'the how' which refers to the demonstrable mechanisms by which desistance signals can be communicated (Maruna, 2012). To illustrate, Bushway and Reuter (2002) claim that enrolling in, participating in and completing employment training ('the how') results in better employment outcomes for ex-offenders. Moreover, these outcomes have little to do with program content and more to do with favourable characteristics, such as the ex-offender's motivation ('the what'), to undertake and complete training (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Although such signals are not causally related to a potential worker's productivity, they suggest to an employer that the intangible qualities, such as motivation, assumed necessary to complete employment programs are the same as those regarded by employers as indicating a good worker (Mooney & Daffern, 2011; Visher, Debus-Sherrill, & Yahner, 2008).

Desistance signalling is important for ex-offenders to find a job since an earlier study conducted by Fahey et al. (2006) reported that employers are more willing to hire an ex-offender when he or she demonstrates a change in their behaviour. Also favourable to employers is an ex-offender exhibiting a positive post-release work history, having completed an employment program or participated in work readiness and job skills training (Fahey et al., 2006; Graffam et al., 2004; Haslewood-Pócsik et al., 2008). These tangible indicators signal something to the employer about the quality of the ex-offender as an employee. Nevertheless, these indicators are associated with employment skills and are not likely to differ too much when considering a job applicant with no criminal past. This leads to the question of whether there are other signals unique to desistance that indicate an ex-offender's change or potential for change. However, unless employers are attuned to discern signals indicating desistance, the employability of desisting offenders may be overshadowed by their offending history (Bushway & Apel, 2012).

As much as scholars have identified factors such as marriage, employment, identity transformation, and social networks as correlates of desistance from crime (Laub et al., 1998; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001), less understood is how others identify an ex-offender's desistance from crime. Neither is there any coverage in current literature around which desistance signals are valued by employers within the specific context of their willingness to hire. This is important to understand since employment, being a correlate of desistance, is contingent upon employers to provide job opportunities (Pager, Western & Sugie, 2009). Therefore, establishing what signals desistance to employers and how they recognise desistance is critical for efficacious desistance signalling to improve employers' willingness to hire.

Underpinning the necessity for signalling rests on the premise that an employer has access to only a portion of information about a job candidate because of what Spence (1973) refers to as ‘information asymmetry’ (see also Connelly et al., 2011). Information asymmetry is particularly challenging for employment decision-making processes. Employers can only rely on the information they have at their disposal about a prospective employee to make hiring decisions. While some information may be publicly available and readily accessible, private information is only available when deliberately shared by the job applicant or a third-party source. In decision-making processes, some people may be privy to information that others may not (Stiglitz, 2002), and subsequently “information asymmetries arise between those who hold that information and those who could potentially make better decisions if they had it” (Connelly, et al., 2011:42). Pursuant to signalling theory, information asymmetry is mitigated when a job applicant’s unobservable (private) qualities are made known to employers.

A criminal record can contribute to the gravity of information asymmetry for the desisting ex-offender since employers have indicated in earlier research that a criminal record signals untrustworthiness and a potential safety risk (Stoll, 2009). Yet, Maruna (2001) questions that if the ex-offender is to convince an employer that he or she is in fact trustworthy and no longer a safety risk, what evidence could they provide to signal this change? Effective desistance signalling is critical for reducing information asymmetry between what a criminal record tells an employer about an ex-offender and what is the current state of the desisting ex-offender for whom his or her criminal record is nothing more than an enduring account of historical behaviour.

Foremost, the individual ex-offender is responsible for establishing signals that will effectively communicate their desistance from crime (McNeill, 2006). Mentioned earlier, employers consider the length of crime-free periods when contemplating the employability of a job applicant with a criminal record. Reliance on time lapses to ascertain desistance and redeemability potential (Fahey et al., 2006; Holzer et al., 2004; Kurlychek et al., 2006) is problematic as the first three years following release from sentence is the time of highest risk for recidivism and therefore the crucial time period for ex-offenders to engage in employment to reduce reoffending risks (Langan & Levin, 2002; Makarios et al., 2010; Payne, 2007; Petersilia, 2005; Pew Center on the States, 2008; Visser, 2007). Ex-offenders are unlikely to have the luxury of time on their side; therefore, it is imperative that other signals of desistance be demonstrated without having to depend on lengthy periods of crime-free time.

Alternative to time factors, scholars have suggested ex-offenders may also signal their desistance to employers via a range of hard and soft skills. Hard skills are formal or technical competencies, such as specific job skills (Moss & Tilly, 1996). They are tangible and easy to identify via demonstrated competency or with documentation confirming the attainment of formal

qualifications or training (Fahey et al., 2006). Nevertheless, Bloom (2012) notes that to maximise the signalling potential of employment related training, it is important to emphasise aspects of these qualifications that are important to employers. Soft skills, on the other hand, are less concrete but are highly valued in the labour market. Soft skills refer to intangible qualities and features such as acquired knowledge, personality traits, motivation, attitude, and interpersonal skills (Crosbie, 2005; Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Soft skills are not independent of hard skills as they often rely on the tangible evidence of an individual's hard skills to also imply the soft skills they possess (Heckman & Kautz, 2012). Often soft and hard skills are also intertwined, as hard, technical skills depend upon the soft skill of acquired knowledge in order to perform technical tasks (Crosbie, 2005).

For employment, the acquisition of hard skills typically occurs by way of participating in and completing employment training (Mooney & Daffern, 2011; Visser et al., 2008). Ex-offenders substantiate the attainment of such skills with references from employment program facilitators (Davidson, 2011; Finn, 1998; Holzer et al., 2002), job placement agencies (Fahey et al., 2006) and previous employers (Fletcher, 2003). For a long time, work skills training for offenders has focussed on hard technical skill development. Yet employers prioritise soft skills over hard skills in the process of making hiring decisions, as illustrated by Ed Roberts (cited in National Institute of Corrections, 2018) who states, “employers are looking for employable workers with soft skills – employers can train them on the specific technical skills needed” (Success stories section, para. 1).

In response to employer demands, more formal processes have emerged in recent years to foster and account for the development of less tangible soft skills. For example, in Washington State Correctional Industries training dedicate an entire component of their employment training for inmates to developing the behavioural and thinking skills employers desire (Department of Corrections, 2016; see also Parese, 2015). A formal certificate of rehabilitation, assessed by a governing professional body, also provides tangible evidence for ex-offenders to signal their desistance (Love, 2003; Lucken & Ponte, 2008; Maruna, 2011). Ex-offenders themselves anticipate that openly disclosing their criminal past to employers, demonstrates their motivation to change (Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2014), reinforced by their expressed desire to work (Maruna, 2012).

Bushway and Apel (2012) distinguish an association between employment-based re-entry programs and desistance. Whilst they do not make claims that employment programs have a direct causal effect on ex-offender employability, they do argue that enrolling in, participating in and completing employment training results in better employment outcomes for ex-offenders. Moreover, these outcomes have little to do with program content and more to do with favourable characteristics, such as the ex-offender's motivation to undertake and complete programs. They further acknowledge that these favourable characteristics for employment are unobservable, yet the behaviour of participating in and completing employment training signals that the ex-offender does in fact possess

these characteristics (see also Finn, 1998). Visser et al. (2008) demonstrated in their study that those who engaged in work and training while in prison experienced lower rearrest and reimprisonment after release, further suggesting participation in work programs may be a valuable signal of desistance from crime (see also Mooney & Daffern, 2011).

Upon consideration of this association between hard and soft skills development, and favourable employment outcomes, the proposition that ex-offenders' desistance can be signalled to employers via indications of being a productive citizen, is supported. Early analyses transpiring from this thesis provides empirical support for this also (Reich, 2017), and are detailed in Chapter Six of this thesis. As part of examining the utility and function of desistance signals within the Willingness to Hire model, it is not only important to establish what employers perceive as signalling desistance, but also the practicalities in terms of how desistance is signalled as per 'the what' and 'the how' described earlier. To bolster my examination of desistance signalling in the Willingness to Hire model, I incorporate the 'signalling timeline' taken from communications literature. I apply the concepts contained within the signalling timeline to progress the theoretical propositions around desistance signalling and assess how desistance signalling might be accomplished in practice.

The Desistance Signalling Timeline: How Desistance Signalling can be Strategically Designed and Effectively Communicated

By establishing which signals are of particular value to employers in their assessment of desistance and how these desistance signals are recognised, perhaps more can be done to assist ex-offenders into the workforce by strategically designed desistance signals. A failure to establish and implement effective ways to explicitly communicate desistance runs the risk of desistance remaining unrecognised by employers and the provision of employment opportunities for ex-offenders may be missed.

As a form of communication, it is critical to consider how signals are transmitted and understood between the sender and the receiver (Gkorezis, Bellou & Skemperis, 2015; Lindenberg, 2003), which in the context of this thesis is the ex-offender or a third party representing the ex-offender, and the employer, respectively. Since the time of Spence's (1973) writing, scholars have contributed to the expansion of signalling theory to incorporate additional propositions about the environment in which signalling occurs, as well as important aspects for increasing the efficacy of signals (Connelly et al., 2011; Dunham, 2011; Soler, Bastiste & Cronk, 2014). Connelly and colleagues (2011:44) conceptualise the way signal transmission and interpretation take place between a sender and receiver in their '*signaling timeline*'. This timeline, which is illustrated in Figure 2.2, sets out key constructs and criteria within the '*signaling environment*' that contribute to signalling efficacy.

The signalling environment refers to the context within which signals are communicated, comprising four key constructs – the signaller, the signal, the receiver, and feedback. The signaller and the receiver are the two primary actors involved in the communication of signals. Signals and feedback constitute the types of communication exchanged between the signaller and receiver. For the purposes of this thesis, I propose this timeline is also adaptable to what I have renamed the ‘*desistance signalling timeline*’, which is illustrated and discussed later in Chapter Six.

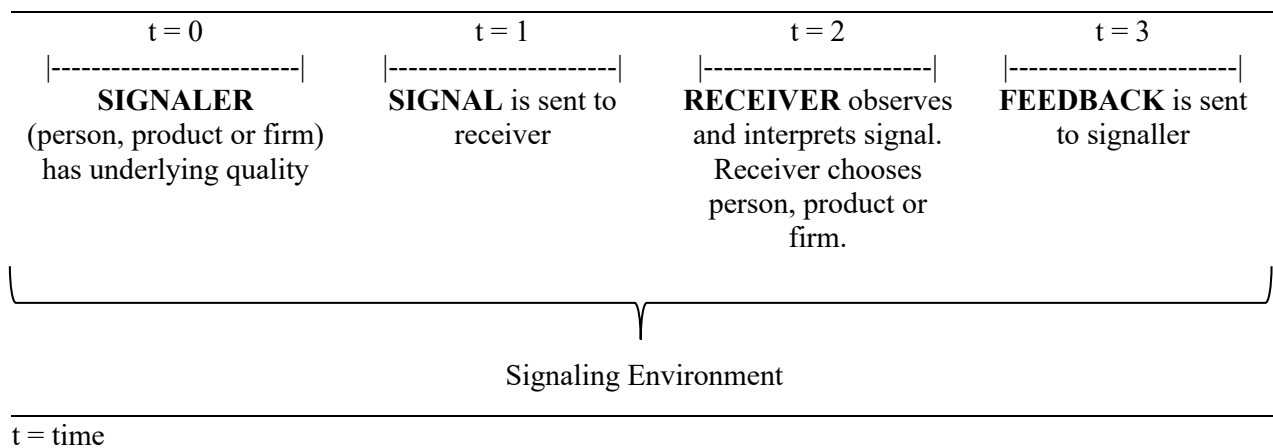


Figure 2.2 The Signaling Timeline. Adopted from “Signaling theory: A review and assessment,” by B. Connelly, T. Certo, R. D. Ireland, and C. R. Reutzel, 2011, *Journal of Management*, 37, p. 44. Copyright 2011 by The Author(s)².

The efficacy of signalling is not solely dependent upon each of the four signalling timeline constructs to be present, but also the quality of each, determined by a number of criteria. Empirical research demonstrating these constructs and criteria have appeared almost exclusively in marketing and human resources literature, examining the influence of signalling on the behaviour [feedback] of consumers (Carter, 2006; Coff, 2002; Lampel & Shamsie, 2000); investors (Balboa & Marti, 2007; Lee, 2001); shareholders (Goranova, Alessandri, Brandes & Dharwadker, 2007; Kang, 2008); and within hiring processes (Ryan, Sacco, McFarland & Kriska, 2000; Ehrhart & Zeigert, 2005; Highhouse, Thornbury & Little, 2007). I propose the four constructs along with the associated criteria for signalling efficacy also have merit in the context of ex-offenders signalling desistance to employers. So far, these constructs and criteria have not featured in desistance signalling literature. To demonstrate the relevance of the signalling timeline to the context in which ex-offenders may

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signal their desistance to employers, I propose the timeline constructs and criteria are also applicable desistance signalling, which I outline in the discussion that follows.

Signaller. The *signaller*, occupies the position of ‘insider’ who possesses information, not yet known but potentially useful to the prospective receiver [discussed later in this section], the ‘outsider’. More recent expansions in signalling theory positions the signaller with the upper hand by virtue of possessing insider information that is potentially valuable to the receiver in formulating their decisions or response (Connelly, et al., 2011). Applied to the context of this study, for the ex-offender, insider knowledge about his or her desistance is information likely to be useful for employers when assessing desistance and their willingness to hire an ex-offender.

Primarily, effective signalling requires the signaller to present as genuine. However, since the signaller stands to benefit from the receiver’s favourable response, there is some incentive for signallers to communicate deceitful signals to improve their appeal (Johnstone & Grafen, 1993). Therefore, the quality of the signaller, determined by his or her genuineness, is assessed by two criteria – *honesty* and *reliability* – and is necessary for the signaller to minimise any suspicions of deceit (Cohen & Dean, 2005; Durcikova & Gray, 2009). Together, the signaller’s honesty and reliability indicate his or her inherent character.

Honesty is gauged by whether or not the signaller does indeed possess the inherent signalled qualities (Arthurs, Busenitz, Hoskisson & Johnson, 2008; Ndofor & Levitas, 2004). To ensure honesty, Maynard-Smith and Harper, (2003) state that the signaller must convey information about his or her qualities, unknown to others, in a manner that cannot be forged and which truthfully represents the intangible qualities they possess (Cohen & Dean, 2005). To illustrate, I draw on Maruna’s (2012) example of a PhD degree signalling qualities of being a hard worker. If the signaller communicates qualities of being a hard worker by claims of having completed a PhD degree, but cannot produce the associated evidence to substantiate their claims, the signal is rendered deceitful, and the signaller, dishonest.

As well as honesty, the reliability of the signaller centres on his or her capacity to perform in line with their signalled qualities (Gomulya & Mishina, 2017). Reliability is measured by whether the extent of the signalled quality coincides with what the signal implies. For reliability to be determined, the signaller’s honesty must first be ascertained. Then, the signal must not exaggerate the magnitude of the implied inherent quality (Ndofor & Levitas, 2004; Sanders & Boivie, 2004). Current desistance signalling literature alludes to this notion of reliability, although not explicitly framed in this term. Rather, scholars propose a range of soft skills such as being motivated, punctual and willing to learn over hard skills such as technical work skills, and as being valuable to employers as indicators of desistance (Bloom, 2012; Holzer, et al., 2002; Visser et al., 2008). As the argument goes, soft skills are the key indicators that distinguish whether a potential employee is a productive

worker or not (Nealy, 2005). Overall, though, possession of hard and soft skills is typically associated with productive citizenship and therefore a reliable indicator of criminal desistance (Schirio, 2012). For this reason, the combination of hard and soft skills is a useful way by which ex-offenders can reliably signal their desistance from crime to employers.

Signal. The signal itself is the second construct in the signalling timeline and refers to the mechanisms used to convey a message or unobservable attribute. New release movie advertisements (Lampel & Shamsie, 2000) and high-profile affiliations (Certo, Daily & Dalton, 2001; Lester, Certo, Dalton, Dalton & Cannella, 2006) such as George Clooney being the face of the Nespresso brand are two examples of signals designed to convey a particular message and elicit a desired response. Whether or not the benefits of signalling are secured is contingent upon a number of factors associated with the signal and the criteria indicating the signal's quality. Signal quality is assessed by five criteria – *observability, cost, fit, consistency* and *frequency*. Signal observability simply refers to how well a receiver is able to recognize a signal. Signal observability relies on tangible evidence by which an unobservable associated quality can become known. Lampel and Shamsie (2000) alternatively refer to observability as signal strength in their study of marketing strategies adopted within the motion picture industry to increase the momentum of consumer sales.

To increase consumer (receiver) appeal, signal strength is vital in this instance since consumers rely heavily on limited information through such things as costly promotions and advertising to make decisions about movie consumption. (Bjorkgren, 1996; Turow, 1984). Applied to desistance signalling, Bloom (2012) argues that whilst signals might be available, they may be weak, and we should examine ways in which they can be reinforced (see also Freeman, 2008). For desisting offenders, being married, completing employment training, or having children are known to encourage and reinforce desistance from crime (Bahr et. al., 2010; Sampson & Laub, 1997; Steiner et. al., 2012; Uggen, 1999; Uggen & Staff, 2001; Wilson, 1997). However, if none of these have any meaning for employers in their assessment of an ex-offender job applicant's desistance, then capitalizing on these factors to signal desistance would be a futile exercise for the ex-offender in their job-hunting endeavours. By knowing which signals are strong indicators of desistance to employers, ex-offenders are better positioned to strategically select signals that maximise the observability of their desistance.

Accompanying signal observability is signal cost. Spence (1973) argues that for signals to be convincing there must be some cost associated with procuring the signal. The cost, which refers to the individual's personal sacrifice or investment, becomes the gauge by which the quality of the signal is then measured (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Spence (1973) illustrates signal cost with education being a costly exercise in terms of both time and money. Krebs and Dawkins (1984) add that signal costs are not entirely related to financial outlay, but are also the investment of personal effort associated

with developing and communicating signals. For instance, high levels of personal and financial costs are required to achieve educational attainment. High costs associated with procuring and communicating such signals reduces the possibility for cheating or fabricating signals, thereby indicating the signal's quality and validating the signaller's honesty (Connelly, et al., 2011; Dunham, 2011; Power, 2017).

As another criterion to assess signal quality, signal fit, requires signals to be an accurate representation of the unobservable attributes they communicate (Connelly, et al., 2011). By definition, signal fit appears the same as signaller honesty. Signal fit is concerned with measuring the quality of the signal, whereas signaller honesty focuses on the quality of the signaller, yet these are not mutually exclusive. For instance, potential investors assessing the trustworthiness of a firm's financial statements (signal fit) are guided by whether or not the chief executive office (CEO) certifying the firm's financial position is credible (signaller honesty) and therefore able to provide an accurate representation (Zhang & Wiersema, 2009). Applied to desistance signalling, ex-offenders should be mindful when formulating a signalling strategy to communicate desistance via signals that are compatible with desistance from crime.

The final two criteria for increasing signalling efficacy and improving signal quality are frequency and consistency, which are complementary to each other. Signal frequency is a quantifying factor concerned with how many times the same unobservable attribute is communicated via different signals (Connelly, et al., 2011). Empirical research demonstrates that signal frequency mitigates information asymmetry (Janney & Folta, 2003), while signal quality and associated efficacy is enhanced under circumstances where multiple signals are transmitted (Gambetta & Hammill, 2005).

Signal consistency, however, is a qualifying factor concerned with whether each of the different signals transmitted correspond with the unobservable attribute being communicated (Gao, Darroch, Mather & McGregor, 2008). In the context of my study, demonstrating desistance across a range of consistent signals allows ex-offenders to communicate as well as reinforce their desistance to employers (Pyrooz & Densley, 2016). In the case of ex-offenders competing in the job market, the added advantage of conveying desistance via a number of different signals attends to the possibility that employers' perspectives about what signals desistance may well differ from one employer to the next.

Taken together, the five criteria by which signal quality can be improved provides a guide for ex-offenders to adopt when designing desistance signalling strategies to enhance signalling efficacy. Beyond this point, whether or not employers interpret the signaller quality of the ex-offender and his or her signals as being indicative of desistance depends on employers' perceptions of desistance. So far, the primary emphasis in desistance signalling literature is placed on what signals desistance, how

it is signalled and who communicates signals. Much less attention has been given to how receivers interpret signals and what governs the discernment process about which signals are valuable.

Being the recipient of desistance signals, employers are best positioned to identify what type of signals are indicative of desistance and how ex-offenders can transmit desistance signals for employers to recognize. According to ‘receiver psychology’, a field of study that examines signal receivers’ cognitive processes for interpreting signals (Guilford & Dawkins, 1991; Rowe, 2013), in order to elicit the desired response from receivers, it is essential to design signals that appeal to receivers’ preferences (Dunham, 2011; Saad, 2006). Reinforcing this, Bloom (2012) suggests that although employers might detect signals, the utility of these signals for employment outcomes will depend on whether the signal holds sufficient value to the employer as an adequate indication of the ex-offender’s desistance from crime. To advance this, Bushway and Apel (2012) recommend an empirical examination to establish if such signals do in fact hold value for employers, as signal receivers.

Receiver. The receiver is the third construct in the signalling environment. Arguably, the receiver occupies the most powerful position in the signalling timeline by virtue of his or her capacity to respond desirably or undesirably to the signaller. Furthermore, Alsos and Ljunggren (2017) argue that the value of signals lies in how they are interpreted, which falls to the receivers’ discretion. At the outset, signallers communicate signals to receivers with the goal of manipulating the behaviour of the receiver (Bergstrom, 2006; Soler et al., 2014), subsequently compelling the receiver to respond in a way they may not have otherwise (Connelly, et al., 2011). Where employers would usually be reluctant to hire ex-offenders, strategically communicating desistance has the potential to invoke favourable hiring decisions when quality desistance signals are received by the employer.

The broad application of signalling theory in research typically frames the receiver as the beneficiary of effective signalling. For example, consumers benefit from effective market signalling by purchasing goods and services (Chung & Kalnins, 2001; Erdem & Swait, 1998; Lampel & Shamsie, 2000); shareholders benefit from the profits of a company signalling a profitable future (Kang, 2008). Signal receivers also feature in research examining job market signalling, class status signalling, job candidate competition, financial market appeal, and religious devoutness (Celani & Singh, 2011; Han, Nunes & Drèze, 2010; Moss, Neubaum & Meyskens, 2015; Power, 2017; Sosis & Bressler, 2003; Spence, 1973).

The opposite seems more likely for employers hiring ex-offenders where the obvious post-hiring beneficiary is the ex-offender. Although less obvious, employers stand to also gain from hiring ex-offenders. Consider the testimony from employers who have hired ex-offenders stating how those who have a criminal record repay the opportunity of being given a second chance with loyalty and reliability (Lockhart, 2012); qualities held in high regard by employers. Essentially both the employer

and ex-offender stand to gain. At the time an employer is contemplating the employment of an ex-offender, precisely what this gain is may be overshadowed by the ex-offender's criminal history. To mitigate this, efficacious desistance signalling should aim to turn the employer's attention away from the offending history and counteract its influence on the employer's hiring decision by amplifying the ex-offender's desistance. Whilst desistance signals may be the marker by which employers gauge an ex-offender's employability and risk of reoffending (Fahey et al., 2006), the effectiveness of these signals is likely to be contingent upon whether and how these signals are perceived by employers. To date there is limited scholarship that considers which desistance signals are most effective in the context of employment outcomes for ex-offenders. Achieving this relies on the employer's capacity to receive signals, determined by two criteria - *receiver attention* and *receiver interpretation*.

Receiver attention is essential for the signalling process to work and entails the receiver deliberately looking for signals or otherwise know what to look for (Connelly, et al., 2011). As it relates to this thesis, employers must pay attention to indicators that signal an ex-offender's desistance, otherwise desistance may go unrecognized. In addition, signalling efficacy improves when employers actively seek out signals of desistance within the signalling environment (Janney & Foltz, 2006). This is especially crucial for identifying weak desistance signals that may otherwise go unnoticed if employers' attention is not concentrated on finding them (Ilmola & Kuusi, 2006). Furthermore, recognizing and effectively using desistance signals to guide hiring decisions potentially improves employers' attention in seeking out similar desistance signals during future hiring processes (Cohen & Dean, 2005).

Accompanying receiver attention is receiver interpretation. Connelly and colleagues (2011:54) define receiver interpretation as "the process of translating signals into perceived meaning". In doing so, the receiver determines the extent of the signal's value for the purpose it is being transmitted. Yet even though signals may be perceptible, some scholars have flagged the prospect that not all signals will be given the same degree of importance (Highhouse et al., 2007; Rynes, 1991) or be interpreted as having the same meaning by all receivers (Perkins & Hendry, 2005; Srivastava, 2001). For example, it is customary amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to avoid eye contact as a sign of respect, however, in Western society avoiding eye contact is interpreted as being a sign of dishonesty, rudeness or indifference (Queensland Health, 2015).

The possibility cannot be ignored that, in contemplating ex-offenders for employment, employers will differentially interpret which signals indicate desistance and which signals do not. In addition, where desistance signals are interpreted accurately, whether or not they are important within the context of assessing the employability of an ex-offender may well differ from one employer to the next, as well as one employment context to the next. The potential for differential interpretation amongst employers amplifies the importance for the transmission of multiple signals to indicate

desistance, and to increase the appeal to a broader range of preferences regarding signals of importance for employers.

Feedback. The signalling timeline is characterized by interaction that takes place between a signaller and receiver via a two-way communication process. At the outset, the signaller conveys messages via signals to which the receiver responds with feedback. Feedback from receivers to signallers is sent via *counter-signals*, to achieve two fundamental purposes: 1) provide an indication to signallers about the efficacy of their signals; and 2) seek additional information from signallers. Within this two-way exchange, signallers are able to ascertain which of his or her own signals are effective by indications the receiver has interpreted signals accurately and/or which signals hold some value to the receiver (Connelly et al., 2011). If necessary, signallers are then able to modify their selected signals before re-sending in order to improve receiver response (Alsos & Ljunggren, 2017).

In circumstances where employers are considering ex-offender job applicants for employment, feedback to ex-offenders may manifest as a way of employers seeking further information to satisfy themselves the ex-offender job applicant is indeed a desister. To address this asymmetry of information, ex-offenders as signallers must provide additional or modified signals. The back and forth communication between senders and receivers, initiated by the receiver's feedback, increases the information shared between both parties and in turn reduces information asymmetry. However, during the exchange of information within the signalling environment, the prospects for reducing information asymmetry can be hindered by *distortion* (Connelly et al., 2011), also referred to in literature as *noise* (de Haan, Offerman & Sloof, 2011; Spiewanowski, 2014).

Noise in the signalling environment distorts the observability of the signal, which has implications for the extent to which information asymmetry can be mitigated. For example, a job applicant's education certificates are a noisy signal to employers, as they do not necessarily reflect whether the applicant possesses the desired qualifications to suit the employer's needs (Spiewanowski, 2014). Distortion occurs because the method employed to convey the signal moderates the signal's observability (Branzei, Ursacki-Bryant, Vertinsky & Zhang, 2001; Carter, 2006; Connelly et al., 2011).

Noise in signalling environments is a particularly important factor for ex-offenders to take into consideration for desistance signalling design. The desistance signalling environment is already distorted by the ex-offender's criminal record which may present with greater observability, signalling undesirable characteristics and overshadowing other signals regarding the ex-offender's desistance and value as an employee. In addition, desistance signalling scholars propose certificates of attainment in education, vocation, or rehabilitation provide an indication about the ex-offender's character as being favourable and therefore signalling desistance. Spiewanowski's (2014) suggestions challenge this proposition, with claims that such certificates potentially raise questions about the

contents of the qualification, in turn distracting employers from recognizing desistance signalled by the qualification.

Whilst procuring signals of desistance are within the scope of the ex-offender to achieve and demonstrate to the employer, for these to be of any value for employment outcomes, my supposition is that ex-offenders need to be strategic in designing effective desistance signals. Central to the desistance signal design, ex-offenders would need to pay particular attention to addressing the key criteria contained within the desistance signalling environment. Improved employment outcomes for ex-offenders does however require a reciprocal exchange of information between the ex-offender and employer with regard to the desistance signalling process, in order to reduce information asymmetry regarding the ex-offender's desistance.

Chapter Summary

Ex-offenders face often insurmountable challenges in their endeavour to find work. Ultimately, employers' hiring decisions will determine their entry to the workforce or continued exclusion from it. Despite current efforts to address the numerous barriers to employment for ex-offenders, employers remain steadfast in their reluctance to hire job applicants with a criminal record. This thesis aims to examine subjective factors pertaining to employers that may also contribute to ex-offenders' employment outcomes, but have not yet been considered.

With this in mind, the focus of my thesis is to test the merits of my adapted employers' Willingness to Hire model to assess employers' subjective factors in relation to their willingness to hire ex-offenders. In particular I examine whether and how the independent and combined influence of redeemability beliefs and desistance signalling are instrumental for employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record. In this context, I extend the theoretical examination of desistance signalling to also examine the practicalities of signalling desistance in ways that are recognisable to employers.

The application of my adapted Willingness to Hire model first appears in Chapter Five which is dedicated to my analysis of belief in redeemability in the context of employers' willingness to hire. The desistance signalling component of the model is then addressed in Chapter Six and builds upon the analyses presented in Chapter Five. In the final chapter, the innovative theoretical and practical implications emerging from this thesis provide support for applying my adapted Willingness to Hire model to strategies aimed at improving employers' willingness to hire job applicants with a criminal record.

3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this thesis I aim to examine why employers are willing to hire some ex-offenders and not others. In particular, I focus on the intrinsic beliefs employers' hold about ex-offenders and their capacity to change and desist from crime. In addition, I investigate whether employers' subjective assessments of desistance are instrumental for their willingness to hire some ex-offenders and not others. To achieve this aim, my study was conducted by mixing quantitative and qualitative research methods. I begin this chapter by describing the ESMM approach of my thesis, along with my research site and participants. Following this I provide a thorough overview of the quantitative and qualitative phases of my research including the analytical approaches associated with each phase. This chapter concludes with an exposition of the presentation of my research results contained in the three integrated results chapters that follow.

Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods research design

ESMM design includes both quantitative and qualitative studies and is conducted across two phases. In the first phase, quantitative data is collected and analysed, which then informs the design of the second phase qualitative data collection (Cresswell, 2014; Ivankova, Creswell & Stick, 2006). Scholars acknowledge that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are entirely sufficient on their own to address more complex research problems (Ivankova et al., 2006; Maruna, 2010). By mixing methods, complex problems can be examined in different ways to enable a more thorough analysis (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Johnson & Turner, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). In line with the goal of ESMM, as well as maximising the reported benefits of ESMM, the approach to this research aims to quantify what relationships exist between offence characteristics, belief in redeemability, desistance signals and employers' willingness to hire in phase one, then explain these findings in greater depth through my qualitative analysis in phase two (Ivankova et al., 2006).

A key characteristic of ESMM research designs is the integration of methods throughout the process. Taken from Ivankova and colleague's article (2006:16), Figure 3.1 depicts the ESMM process for this study with two distinct points of integration between phase one and phase two of the research, and also in the reporting of results. Similar to previous studies employing ESMM (Klassen, Krawchuk, Lynch & Rajani, 2008), my research integrated the quantitative and qualitative methods in three ways. First, at the intermediate stage between the first and second phase, the preliminary quantitative analyses guided the development of the interview protocol for the second phase qualitative study.

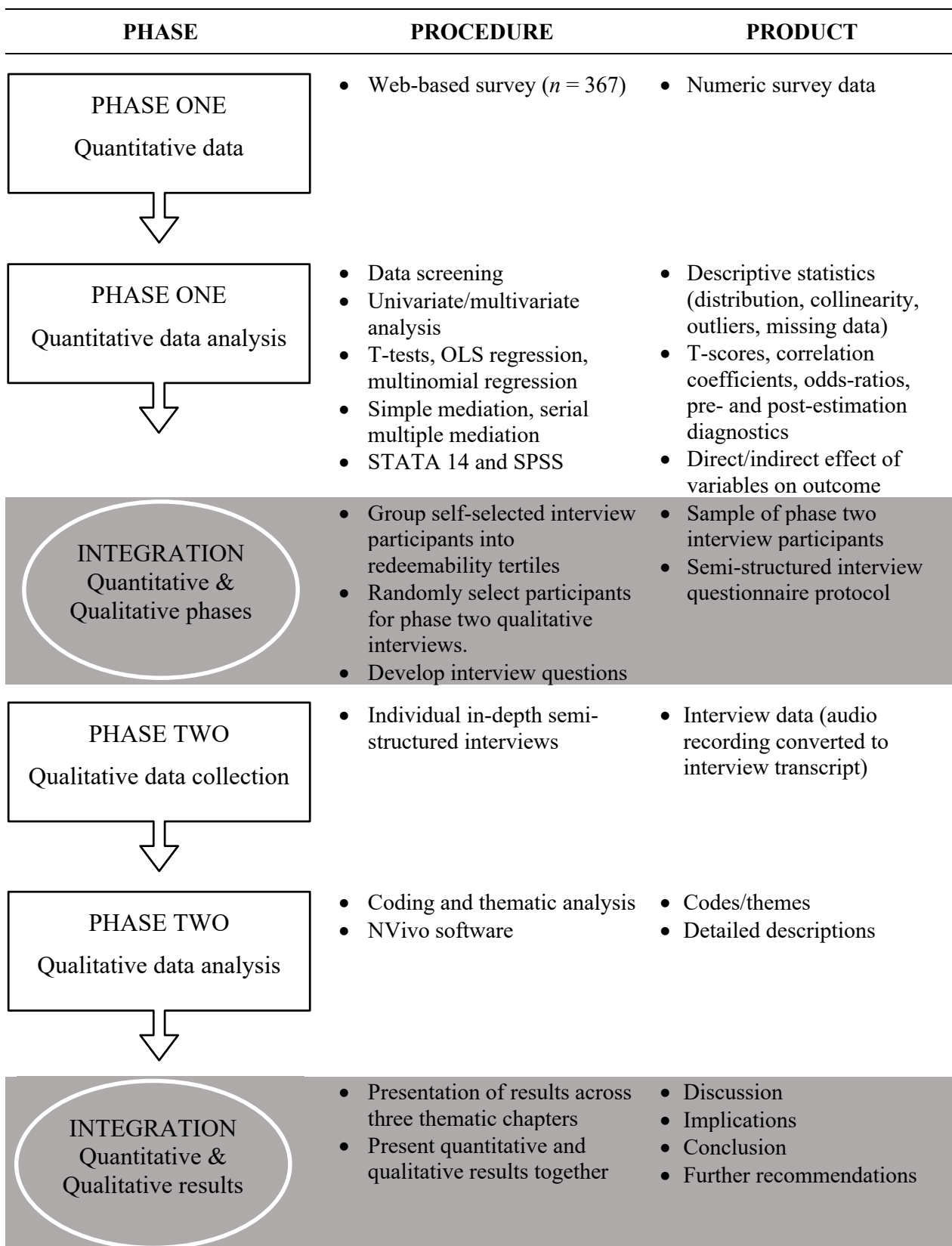


Figure 3.1. Visual model for mixed-methods sequential explanatory design procedures. Adapted from “Using mixed-methods sequential explanatory design: From theory to practice,” by N. V. Ivankova, J. W. Creswell and S. L. Stick, 2006, *Field Methods*, 18, p.16. Copyright 2006 by Sage Publications.

Second, the two methods were connected at the point of randomly selecting interview participants from a sub-sample of participants from phase one, stratified by belief in redeemability scores. Finally, the results of the quantitative analysis direct the analysis of the qualitative data and are integrated for reporting (Creswell, 2014). The purpose for the phase one study is to establish a general understanding of employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender which is then explained in greater detail in phase two by interview participants through their own narratives (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). The mixed methods research notation to describe my study is quan → QUAL = explain results (Morse & Niehaus, 2009). The capitalised QUAL denotes phase two holds greater priority for achieving the overall aims of this study. The arrow between indicates the study follows a sequential design (Morse, 1991, 2003).

Philosophical Assumptions

My study is underpinned by pragmatist philosophical assumptions (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Pragmatism is a problem-centred, rather than a theory- or methodology-driven approach to research, where the research question is of primary importance and draws on a variety of methods to effectively be answered (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Combining a postpositivist and constructivist worldview, the phenomena under study is examined from the perspective of being measured as a single objective reality and understood from multiple subjective positions, respectively (Cherryholmes, 1992; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). By way of deductive reasoning, the purpose of my phase one quantitative study is to empirically test whether varying offence characteristics, belief in redeemability and desistance signalling have any association with employers' willingness to hire some ex-offenders and not others. In accordance with postpositivism, one way to assess these relationships is by survey design to obtain objective measures of the variables of interest and apply these measures to statistical analyses (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). The purpose of my phase two study is to elaborate on the quantitative results and provide a deeper subjective understanding of how employers conceptualise redeemability and recognise desistance from crime. In line with the constructivist view that individuals create meaning through subjective experiences (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018), I have elected to conduct face-to-face interviews to extend the knowledge gleaned from phase one of this study through an elicitation of employers' subjective views about why a criminal record matters in hiring decisions, whether offenders can change, what desistance from crime depends on and how they perceive desistance (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Research Site

This research was conducted in Toowoomba, a regional city in Queensland, Australia. Toowoomba has a population of 160,779 and is located approximately 130km west of Brisbane (ABS, 2016a). Three reasons govern and support my selection of Toowoomba as a study site. First, Toowoomba's offender population is representative of the state-wide offender population and therefore local employment opportunities for offenders are important (DJAG, 2014). Second, the employment sector in Toowoomba is characterised by industries (ABS, 2012) in which ex-offenders typically find employment, such as trade industries, manufacturing, and retail and services (Haslewood-Pócsik et al., 2008; Lichtenberger, 2006; Waldfogel, 1994). Also, a sufficient sample size can be obtained from Toowoomba workplaces with 36.1 percent ($n > 5,000$) employing at least one person, which is comparable to 38.2 percent of businesses across Queensland also employing one or more people (ABS, 2012). Finally, situating the study in Toowoomba made the data collection phase more feasible due to my own place of residence also being in Toowoomba.

Participants and Sampling Frame

The participants in my study are employers³ aged eighteen and over who are either business owners or occupying positions in which they hold hiring decision responsibilities. The sampling frame for this study was purposively selected from the Toowoomba Yellow Pages (hardcopy and online) directory, which is reported as being a useful resource for generating a sampling frame in Australia (Merrilees, Bentley & Cameron, 1999; Sathye, 1999). Industries and businesses that are permitted by *The Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (AHRC, 2012a) to discriminate against job applicants with a criminal record, such as nursing, taxi services and security, were excluded from my sampling frame. Additionally, in Queensland anyone working with children and young people must obtain a 'Blue Card', which involves a full criminal history check. Although a criminal record does not exclude an applicant from obtaining a blue card, the process is heavily regulated, making it difficult to obtain for ex-offenders (DJAG, 2016). Therefore, industries in which a Blue Card is likely to be required were also excluded.

Included in my sampling frame were industries in which ex-offenders are likely to find employment, since most have poor education, low attainment of job skills or qualifications, and limited work histories (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey et al., 2006). Consequently, I selected industries with low-skill, entry-level type positions, where ex-offenders usually find work (Dale, 1976; Western, 2002). The final sampling frame consisted of 1,999 businesses across twenty-five

³ For ease of reference the collective term 'employers' is used in this thesis to refer to either business owners, or employees who occupy positions with hiring decision responsibilities.

industry types. I then aggregated and stratified the sampling frame into two strata—construction and trade ($n = 1,087$); and retail and services ($n = 912$)—representative of the typical ex-offender job industries (Peck & Theodore, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

This thesis involved the voluntary participation of employers aged over eighteen, which is not a group considered to be vulnerable and therefore the risks involved were deemed to be low. The primary ethical considerations made were in regard to informed consent, researcher-participant relationship, and confidentiality. To address these, participants were openly informed about the research being conducted and what was required of them should they volunteer to participate. This was reinforced by providing participant information guides and also obtaining informed consent (see first page of Appendix 2) from each participant at the outset of both phases of the research. Within these documents, participants were informed of their rights to withdraw at any time without penalty and a brief of the results could be obtained via a written request to myself.

As much as possible, participants were able to engage in the research in a manner that was most convenient and comfortable for them. For instance, completing the online survey from anywhere at any time, electing a preferred interview time and location, using only the contact details provided by participants, and standardising the recruitment and data collection processes to ensure all participants were treated equally. All data was stored on a password protected computer in accordance with the guiding principles contained within the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (Australian Research Council, 2007). Data was de-identified for analysis and likewise reported with careful consideration to ensure confidentiality was maintained and no identifying details were incorporated into the reporting of my results. Ethics approval for this thesis was granted by the University of Queensland School of Social Science Ethical Review Panel on 28 November 2014, with ethics clearance number RHD9/2014 (see Appendix 1).

Phase One Quantitative Study: Gauging employers' willingness to hire

The aim of phase one was to empirically establish three key relationships. First, whether and how race and offence characteristics differentially influence employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender. Second, whether belief in redeemability matters for employers' willingness to hire. Third, whether and how the hard and soft skills that might signal desistance to employers also influence their willingness to hire.

To achieve these stated aims I designed the Willingness to Hire Survey, a web-based survey hosted by SurveyMonkey (see Appendix 2). Web-based surveys are time and cost effective (Hogg, 2003), they minimise error in data collection (Wilson & Laskey, 2003) and previous web-based

surveys report successful response rates (see for example Erickson, von Schrader, Bruyère & VanLooy, 2014). Consistent with the quantitative data collection phase in an ESMM approach, my phase one survey was designed to establish a general understanding of the relationships delineated in the quantitative research questions.

Recruitment and Procedure

Prior to conducting the phase one study, I ran a test survey with a group of academics, graduate students and personal contacts in business ($n = 26$). The purpose for doing so was to check the face validity of questions asked in the survey as well as the construct validity of the scales used. Testers also provided feedback. Where appropriate, amendments were made to the survey instrument on the basis of feedback received.

For the phase one survey I conducted a full census of the businesses in the two industries identified in the sampling frame ($n = 1,999$). Data collection commenced on 11 February 2015 and continued until early June 2015. A three-step recruitment process was used to minimise low response rates and address limitations associated with web-based research, such as perceptions of email invitations being junk mail and the impersonal approach to research (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Scholl, Mulders & Drent, 2002). In the first step, I contacted each business via a telephone call. The purpose for the primary contact via telephone was three-fold: 1) to establish who makes the hiring decisions for the business in order to personalise all subsequent contact; 2) if possible, speak with the owner/employer responsible for hiring and briefly introduce the research; and 3) invite participation (Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2009; Sauermann & Roach, 2013). Research shows that pre-notification of receiving an invitation to participate in research is effective for increasing response rates (Manzo & Burke, 2012), especially when using a non-email-based method of contact at the outset (for examples see Bosnjak, Neubarth, Couper, Bandilla & Kaczmirek, 2008; Harmon, Westin & Levin, 2005). This primary contact strategy is also consistent with Freedman and Fraser's (1966) 'foot-in-the-door' technique of sampling. This technique relies on prospective participants agreeing to a small request (i.e. short web-based survey) upon initial contact, thereby enhancing their interest in the study to increase the prospects that they will agree later to a larger related request (i.e. face-to-face interviews) (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Since the initial contact with prospective participants was via telephone and not in written form, I standardised the recruitment procedure by following a pre-determined script to introduce the research and invite employers to participate. Once they had accepted my invitation, I obtained the employer's name and email address to enable direct email contact immediately after the initial telephone call. This email contained the participant information guide, a personalised cover letter, a link to the SurveyMonkey survey instrument, and a unique code provided to each respondent. The

unique code enabled re-identification of respondents upon receipt of their completed survey in order to facilitate an efficient follow up system whereby only those who had not completed the survey would receive a follow up reminder email (third contact). Two weeks after initial contact (Dillman et al., 2009), the third and final contact comprised of a reminder email which was sent to those who had not yet submitted a completed survey.

During the recruitment process, I encountered a number of businesses that had either closed, disconnected their listed contact number, or were deemed out of scope, most commonly because they were not located in Toowoomba. As well, a number of businesses had multiple listings in the Yellow Pages not identified at the initial stage of building the sampling frame due to being listed under different business names or phone numbers. After accounting for closed, disconnected, unsuitable and duplicate businesses, the overall sampling frame was reduced to 1,521 (construction and trade strata $n = 839$; retail and services strata $n = 682$).

Response Rate

Calculation for the response rate to my phase one quantitative study is carried out in accordance with the guidelines set out in the *Standard definitions: Final dispositions of case codes and outcome rates for surveys* (American Association of Public Opinion Research [AAPOR], 2016). Within these guidelines, Groves and Lyberg (1988) make comment about the inconsistency of calculating and reporting response rates, leaving comparisons across surveys open to misinterpretations. Taking on board this criticism, I documented the outcome of each telephone call made (see Table 3.2) in accordance with the codes set by the AAPOR (see Table 3.1) in order to accurately calculate response rates.

The AAPOR offers a number of formulas for calculating response rates. Since my analyses in this thesis was based only on complete responses received, the RR1 formula is most appropriate here, which is calculated with reference to the codes outlined in Table 3.1 as follows:

$$RR1 = \frac{I}{(I + P) + (R + NC + O) + (UH + UO)}$$

Therefore, the response rates for this thesis are calculated as follows:

$$RR1 = \frac{367}{(367 + 21) + (216 + 3 + 21 + 278) + (142 + 11)} = \frac{367}{1,059} = 34.7\%$$

This overall response rate of 34.7 percent is notable as previous research carried out specifically with employers have reported low response rates of between 8 and 17 percent (see for example Haslewood-Pócsik et al., 2008; Lukies et al., 2011).

Table 3.1

Telephone call outcome codes

| CODE | OUTCOME | DESCRIPTION |
|-------------|----------------------------|--|
| E | Eligible | Meets the criteria for participation |
| NE | Not eligible | Does not meet the criteria for participation |
| I | Complete interview | Survey instrument is 100% complete |
| P | Partial interview | Survey instrument is 50-99% complete |
| R | Break-off | Survey instrument is less than 50% complete |
| R | Refusal | Contact made but declined participation |
| NC | Non-contact | Unable to make contact with potential participant |
| UO | Unknown eligibility, other | Unable to determine eligibility due to non-contact |

Table 3.2

Phase one survey participant recruitment call outcomes

| Call Outcome | Construction & Trade Strata | Retail & Services Strata | Total | Response code |
|----------------------------|--|---|--------------|--------------------------|
| Successfully contacted | 567 | 483 | 1,050 | |
| Agreed to participate | 446 | 388 | 834 | E |
| Declined to participate | 121 | 95 | 216 | R |
| Hung up | 2 | 1 | 3 | R |
| Agreed then retracted | 12 | 9 | 21 | R |
| Answering machine | 176 | 102 | 278 | NC |
| No answer | 66 | 76 | 142 | UO |
| Phone turned off | 9 | 2 | 11 | UO |
| Duplicate entries | 112 | 80 | 192 | NE |
| Phone number disconnected | 74 | 93 | 167 | NE |
| Business closed | 41 | 42 | 83 | NE |
| Non-qualifier/not suitable | 21 | 17 | 38 | NE |
| Fax machine | 1 | 6 | 7 | NE |
| Survey completion | | | | |
| Completed | 189 | 178 | 367 | I |
| Break-off (incomplete) | 10 | 11 | 21 | P |

Measures

The Willingness to Hire Survey was designed for this PhD project to obtain measures about employers' willingness to hire job applicants with a criminal record, desistance signals, belief in redeemability and respondents' demographic characteristics. A thorough review of current literature provided the theoretical basis for the survey design. Measures and a range of variables from previous

key studies guiding the direction of this research were adopted and adapted for use in my survey instrument. I describe these measures and variables below and how each were coded for analysis⁴.

Dependent variables. The dependent variables in this study measured the extent to which employers are willing to hire a job applicant with a criminal record. Participants were provided with a vignette describing a hypothetical situation in which the participant employer is considering a job applicant, John, for a position within their business. This vignette was designed to control for the effects of the applicant's race and criminal record on employers' willingness to hire (Pager & Western, 2009), which to date, had not been explicitly tested within the Australian context.

The vignette was presented to participants in two parts. In the first part, the hypothetical hiring scenario was presented and described the hiring situation: John the job applicant who is Caucasian Australian or Indigenous Australian, his work history, formal qualifications and personal presentation. Participants were randomly assigned either the Caucasian or Indigenous job applicant race condition. Apart from John's race, identified by name and description, all other details in the vignette were identical. The first part of the vignette is worded as follows:

You recently advertised a position available with your company/business for a job that does not require any formal qualifications or particular set of skills. The duties of this position require the employee to carry out general duties as needed and any particular training relevant to your workplace will be given on the job. Today you are interviewing John Watson (Wurundjeri), one of the job applicants. John is a 26-year-old Caucasian (Indigenous) Australian male who has applied for employment within your company/business. John arrives at your office on time for his interview and you notice that he appears to be reasonably presented. During the interview, John tells you that he has no formal qualifications and his previous work experience has been in jobs requiring a minimal level of skill. John appears to be motivated to work.

Willingness to hire pre-disclosure of criminal record dependent variable (DV1: Hire1Base).

After reading the first part of the vignette, participants were asked to rate their agreement with the statement "I would hire John for this job" (Snider & Reyson, 2014). Responses were rated using a seven-point Likert-type scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = mildly disagree, 4 = neither agree or disagree, 5 = mildly agree, 6 = moderately agree, 7 = strongly agree. This first measure enabled me to examine whether an association between a job applicant's race and employers' willingness to hire could be detected.

⁴ Not all variables transpiring from the survey data collection have been used for this thesis. For this reason, only the variables used for analysis in this thesis are outlined here in this methodology chapter.

The second part of the vignette was then presented to respondents, revealing John's criminal record including the type of crime he committed, the chronicity of his prior offending, the sentence he received, and the length of time since the completion of his sentence. The second part of the vignette is worded as follows:

While going over John's application you notice he has a criminal record. The following information about John's criminal history is made available to you:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Type of crime committed: | <i>Violent</i> |
| Number of convictions: | <i>Single</i> |
| Type of sentence received: | <i>Community service</i> |
| Time lapse since discharge: | <i>Less than 2 years</i> |

Willingness to hire post-disclosure of criminal record dependent variable (DV2: Hire2Base and Hire2). After reading the second part of the vignette, participants were asked to rate their agreement with the same statement "I would hire John for this job" (Snider & Reyson, 2014), using the same seven-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = mildly disagree, 4 = neither agree or disagree, 5 = mildly agree, 6 = moderately agree, 7 = strongly agree. This second measure, *Hire2Base*, enabled me to examine whether a difference could be detected among employers' willingness to hire after a criminal record is disclosed compared to the pre-disclosure condition at the first measure, *Hire1Base*. In addition, this two-step approach allowed me to assess whether employers' willingness to hire pre- and post-disclosure of the criminal record also differed by the applicant's race. For the purposes of conducting the Multinomial Logistic regression analyses later in this thesis, this variable has been recoded to a trichotomous variable, *Hire2*. Based on employers' rated agreement about whether they would be willing to hire a job applicant with a criminal record, *Hire2* is recoded as -1 = disagree, 0 = neither agree nor disagree, 1 = agree. Aggregating employers' willingness to hire into these three distinct categories allows me to make meaningful comparisons between those who agree, or neither agree nor disagree with those who disagree (reference category) that they would be willing to hire. In doing so, I was able to assess whether there are different reasons for why some employers are unwilling to hire when others are willing or remain in the middle as fence sitters.

Alternative offence characteristics (DV3 – DV7). Previous research suggests employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender depends on various characteristics of the ex-offender's criminal history (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey et al., 2006; Graffam et al., 2008; Kling, 2006). To examine whether and how varying offence characteristics differentially influence employers willingness to

hire, I asked employers to rate how their willingness to hire John would alter from the variable *Hire2Base* under the following conditions: He had multiple convictions on his criminal record instead of a single conviction (*MultiConv*); He received a prison sentence instead of community service (*Prison*); It has been longer than 2 years since he completed his community service (*Over2Years*); His conviction was for theft instead of violence (*Theft*); His conviction was for drug-related offending instead of violence (*Drug*). Participants rated their response on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = less willing to hire; 4 = unchanged; 7 = more willing to hire.

Included in the range of alternative conditions was a question to assess the effects of gender on employers' willingness to hire (Decker, 2014; Galgano, 2009). I asked employers how their willingness to hire John would alter if he was a woman called Jane instead of a man called John (*Woman*). Although this is not an offence characteristic I include it here as it was included in the group of questions assessing whether and how alternative offence characteristics/conditions would alter employers' willingness to hire.

Independent Variables. The independent variables for this study include the ex-offender's race, a measure for belief in redeemability, two composite variables measuring hard skills and soft skills as proxies for desistance signals, and a range of socio-demographic and organisational context variables.

Ex-offender job applicant's race (IV1: Race). The vignette study design differed only by the race factor to enable comparisons between employers' responses on the basis of the hypothetical applicant's race condition. As explained, survey participants were randomly assigned a vignette describing either a Caucasian Australian ($n = 187$) or Indigenous Australian ($n = 180$) ex-offender job applicant. A dichotomous variable was then created for later regression analyses where 0 = Indigenous Australian; and 1 = Caucasian Australian.

Belief in redeemability (IV2: BRGen). The Belief in Redeemability Scale is designed to measure the extent to which respondents believe offenders have the capacity to change and live offence-free lives. I adopt the 4-item scale developed by Maruna and King (2009) ($\alpha = .64$), which asks respondents to rate their agreement with the following statements:

1. Most offenders can go on to lead productive lives with help and hard work
2. Even the worst young offender can grow out of criminal behaviour
3. Most offenders really have little hope of changing for the better
4. Some offenders are so damaged that they can never lead productive lives

Respondents rated their agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = mildly

disagree, 4 = mildly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree. Items three and four were reverse coded then the mean of all four items was calculated to provide a single belief in redeemability score between one and six ($\alpha = .63$) where 1 represents a low belief in redeemability and 6 represents a high belief in redeemability. I adapted Maruna and King's (2009) scale into a further three scales to also measure participants' belief in redeemability for violent ($\alpha = .68$), drug ($\alpha = .74$) and property ($\alpha = .75$) offenders. Although I have not used these adapted scales in my analysis for this thesis, I make mention of them here since they appear in the appended survey and will be used in a later publication.

Desistance signalling. Measures relating to hard skills and soft skills are included in this survey as proxies for desistance signals. As discussed in Chapter Two, Bushway and Apel (2012) propose that an ex-offender's desistance may be signalled to employers via a range of hard and soft skills and may also be associated with improved employment outcomes for job applicants with a criminal record. To enable an empirical assessment of whether and how soft skills and hard skills as proxies for desistance signals might influence employers' willingness to hire, I incorporated a number of measures from Fahey et al.'s (2006) study on the basis that they aligned with Bushway & Apel's (2012) theoretical propositions. Additional measures were also created to test the merit of other factors also reported in the literature to be associated with desistance, but not included in Fahey et al.'s (2006) study. This included the ex-offender openly disclosing his criminal record (Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2014). Table 3.3 displays the total thirteen items measuring hard and soft skills that were included in my survey.

Upon examination of the bi-variate correlations I identified high correlation scores across a number of items included in this study as proxies for desistance signals which suggests potential factorability (see Table 3.4). Correlation coefficients ranging between .50 and 1.00 indicate a strong bivariate relationship (Laerd Statistics, 2018). To investigate the factorability of these variables, I ran a full factorial analysis and found all thirteen items hung on two distinct factors (see Table 3.3). Factor one loadings included scale items 8 – 13 and ranged from .79 to .91. Factor two loadings included scale items 1 – 7 and ranged from .73 to .83. Eigenvalues for both were high at 7.65 and 2.14, respectively, and are reflected in the screeplot depicted in Figure 3.2. Among the variables loading onto the first factor, the majority measured the effect of soft skills on employers' willingness to hire. The majority of variables loading onto the second factor measured the effect of hard skills on employers' willingness to hire. Accordingly, I conducted separate factor extractions for each from which I created two new composite variables—*SoftSkills* and *HardSkills*—as detailed below.

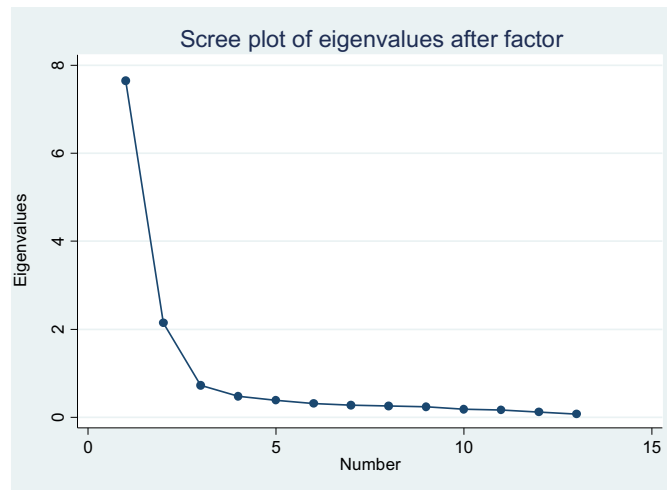


Figure 3.2 Screeplot of eigenvalues for full principal components factor analysis

Hard skills as a proxy for desistance signals (IV3: *HardSkills*). Of the seven scale items (numbers 1 – 7) predominantly measuring the effect of hard skills on employers’ willingness to hire, high correlations were detected among all with coefficients ranging from .52 to .80, significant at $p < .001$. To investigate the assumption that there are correlations among these items, I ran a factor extraction by conducting a principal components factor (PCF) analysis using the *factor* command in STATA 14, with varimax rotation. The PCF analysis showed that all seven items loaded onto one factor with loadings ranging from .73 to .89 and an eigenvalue of 4.97, also illustrated in the screeplot of eigenvalues (see Figure 3.3). The one factor explained 71% of the variance. The scale was shown to be reliable with an alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .93$. The Kaiser-Meyer-Okin (KMO) post-estimation test of sampling adequacy scored highly at .91 and rated as “marvellous” as small values suggest variables do not share adequate commonalities to warrant factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974:35; Stata, 2015). Subsequently, I created the *HardSkills* composite variable from these seven items.

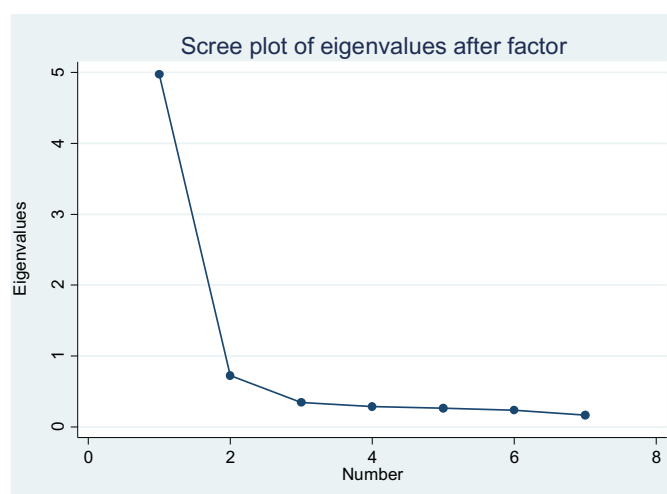


Figure 3.3 Screeplot of HardSkills principal components factor analysis

Table 3.3

Principal components factor analysis – Pattern matrix and Eigenvalues

| ITEM | FACTOR | |
|---|--------------|----------------------------|
| | 1 | 2 |
| Hard Skills (proxy measures for desistance signalling) ¹ | | |
| <i>Respondents rated how the following conditions would alter their willingness to hire:</i> | .292 | .735 |
| 1. He openly disclosed details about his criminal record to you | .296 | .832 |
| 2. He had received specific job skill training appropriate to your industry | .289 .355 | .825 .815 |
| 3. He was employed prior to his conviction | | |
| 4. He had built a positive employment record after this most recent offence | .266 | .834 |
| 5. He completed an employment program after his conviction | .149 | .732 |
| 6. An intermediary agency (e.g. employment agency that screens potential job candidates) referred John for employment with your establishment | .203 | .797 |
| 7. He received a certificate from the court where he was first convicted to state he was rehabilitated. | | |
| Soft Skills (proxy measures for desistance signalling) ² | | |
| <i>Respondents rated their agreement with their decision to hire depending less on John's criminal record and more on:</i> | .904 | .288 |
| 8. His attitude. E.g. motivated, eager to learn, willing to work, enthusiastic | .906 | .275 |
| 9. His ability to interact with others. E.g. good communication skills, friendly, he is likeable | .867 | .230 |
| 10. The way he presents himself e.g. his clothes, cleanliness and grooming | .861 | .273 |
| 11. His prior work history. E.g. types of jobs he has held, length of time in prior jobs | .819 | .200 |
| 12. Whether I think he would fit in with my business/company | .794 | .198 |
| 13. His formal qualifications. E.g. prior training, trade certificate, tertiary degree, technical skills | | |
| Eigenvalues | 7.65 | 2.14 |
| % of Variance | 38.10 | 37.24 |

¹ Likert scale measures: 1 = less likely to hire; 4 = unchanged; 7 = more likely to hire² Likert scale measures: 1 = strongly agree; 4 = neither agree nor disagree; 7 = strongly agree

Table 3.4

Pearson's r correlation coefficients for survey items measuring hard skills and soft skills as proxies for desistance signalling

| | Disclosed criminal record | Job skill training | Pre-conviction employment | Positive employment record | Employment program completion | Agency referral | Certificate of rehabilitation | Attitude | Ability to interact | Presentation | Prior work history | Company fit | Formal qualifications |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Disclosed criminal record | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Job skill training | .701 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Pre-conviction employment | .694 | .797 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Positive employment record | .686 | .769 | .730 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Employment program completion | .655 | .742 | .778 | .787 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Agency referral | .433 | .550 | .523 | .580 | .590 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Certificate of rehabilitation | .517 | .632 | .615 | .660 | .693 | .710 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Attitude | .478 | .494 | .482 | .555 | .480 | .372 | .416 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Ability to interact | .472 | .487 | .489 | .548 | .477 | .345 | .404 | .918 | 1.00 | - | - | - | - |
| Presentation | .419 | .457 | .439 | .488 | .442 | .301 | .343 | .858 | .890 | 1.00 | - | - | - |
| Prior work history | .411 | .482 | .463 | .531 | .465 | .341 | .418 | .827 | .799 | .735 | 1.00 | - | - |
| Company fit | .432 | .389 | .401 | .455 | .375 | .272 | .327 | .755 | .759 | .678 | .717 | 1.00 | - |
| Formal qualifications | .314 | .412 | .413 | .410 | .380 | .291 | .361 | .715 | .694 | .630 | .773 | .610 | 1.00 |

Note: All coefficients in this table are significant at $p < .001$

Soft skills as a proxy for desistance signals (IV4: SoftSkills). An examination of the bi-variate correlations between the six scale items predominantly measuring the effect of soft skills on employers' willingness to hire showed each of these variables to be highly correlated (see Table 3.4). Correlation coefficients ranged from .61 to .92, with all correlations significant at $p < .001$. The same PCF analysis used to assess the factorability of the *HardSkills* composite variable was adopted again here. In this test all six variables loaded onto one factor with factor loadings ranging from .82 to .95 and an eigenvalue of 4.80. This is also supported by the screeplot of eigenvalues clearly depicting a distinct drop after the first factor (see Figure 3.4). The one factor explained 80% of the variance with an alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .95$. Again, the KMO measure for sampling adequacy is .90, considered also as “marvellous” (Kaiser, 1974:35; Stata, 2015). A new composite variable was created including all variables that loaded onto this one factor. I call this composite variable *SoftSkills* given the greater emphasis on soft skills within the range of attributes tested here.

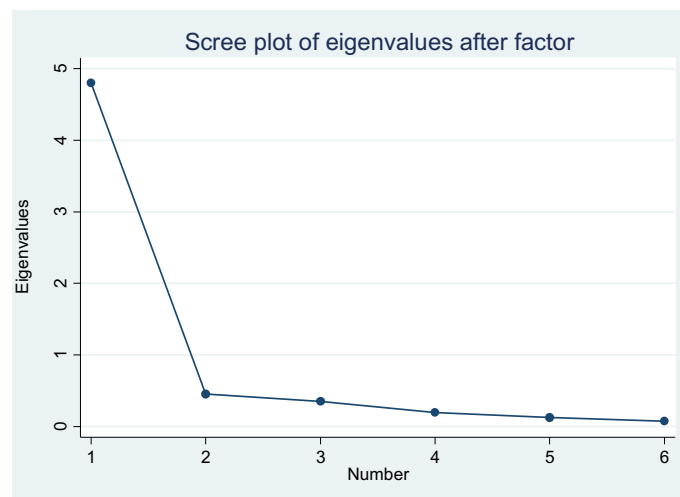


Figure 3.4 Screeplot of SoftSkills principal components factor analysis

Socio-demographic characteristics and organisational-context control variables. Measures for employers' socio-demographic characteristics were adopted from Lukies et al.'s (2011) study relating to age, gender, and education, as well as a range of organisational context variables. These relate to the employers' role, type of industry, size of business measured by the total number of employees, and previous experience hiring an ex-offender. The items measuring each of these variables are as follows:

Age and Gender. Participants were asked to indicate their age range coded as 0 = 18-30 years; 1 = 31 – 40 years; 2 = 41-50 years; and 3 = 51 years and over; and gender, coded as either 0 = male or 1 = female.

Education. Participants were required to indicate their highest level of education where 0 = not completed secondary school; 1 = completed secondary school; 2 = completed trade or technical and further education (TAFE); and 3 = tertiary qualification. For analysis in this thesis, this variable has been recoded to a dummy variable where 0 = not completed secondary school; and 1 = completed secondary education, trade, TAFE or tertiary qualification.

Position/role in business (WorkRole). Participants were asked to select which role best describes their position out of 0 = administrator; 1 = director; 2 = human resources position; 3 = manager; 4 = other (free text); or 5 = owner. For analysis, this variable was recoded as a dummy variable to differentiate between business owners and employees where 0 = employee (aggregated from HR position, director, administrator and manager); and 1 = Owner (as reported). A determination of employee or owner was made intuitively for those who selected “other” on the basis of what was indicated by their free text response.

Industry Strata (IndustryStrata). As part of the sampling frame, selected businesses were categorised under one of two industry strata. These strata were retained for analysis and were coded as 0 = construction and trade; and 1 = retail and services.

Employee total (EmployTotal). The total number of staff employed within each participants’ business was used as an indication of the size of their business. Participants were asked to indicate how many staff were employed by selecting from the following ranges 0 = 1 – 10; 1 = 11 – 20; 2 = 21 – 30; 3 = 31 – 40; 4 = 41 – 50; 5 = 51-100; 6 = 101 – 200; and 7 = over 200. For my analysis, I recoded this variable to six response categories, with the first five (i.e. 0 – 4) remaining unchanged and aggregating the original response categories 5, 6 and 7 to 5 = over 50 staff.

Employees with a criminal record. Participants were asked how many employees they had hired in the past that had a criminal record (to their knowledge). Participants could nominate their response from 1 through to 10 or more.

Experience hiring an ex-offender. Participants who indicated a previous experience hiring an ex-offender were then asked to rate the quality of that experience on a 5-point scale ranging from -2 = very negative; -1 = negative; 0 = neutral; 1 = positive; and 2 = very positive.

Positive hiring experience (CrimHiredPos). For analysis, I created a new dummy variable from a combination of the above two variables. The *CrimHiredPos* dummy variable aggregates respondents into two groups according to participants’ having hired an ex-offender in the past (or not) and the quality of that experience with 0 = no/negative/neutral previous hiring experience; and 1 = previous positive hiring experience.

Table 3.5

Descriptive statistics of all variables and measures

| Variables | n (%) / mean | SD | Min. | Max. |
|-------------------------------|--|------|------|------|
| Hire1Base | 4.62 | 1.22 | 1 | 7 |
| Hire2Base | 3.38 | 1.40 | 1 | 7 |
| Hire2 | Disagree (-1) = 179 (48.8); Neither agree nor disagree (0) = 106 (28.9); Agree (1) = 82 (22.3) | NA | -1 | 1 |
| BRGen | 3.98 | 0.85 | 1 | 6 |
| Race | Indigenous Australian (0) = 180 (49); Caucasian Australian (1) = 187 (51) | NA | 0 | 1 |
| CRDisclosure ¹ | 4.20 | 1.38 | 1 | 7 |
| JobSkillTrain ¹ | 4.38 | 1.33 | 1 | 7 |
| PriorCRWork ¹ | 4.84 | 1.41 | 1 | 7 |
| PositiveWorkHist ¹ | 4.81 | 1.34 | 1 | 7 |
| EmplProg ¹ | 4.24 | 1.24 | 1 | 7 |
| AgencyReferral ¹ | 3.97 | 1.36 | 1 | 7 |
| CourtRehabCert ¹ | 4.10 | 1.28 | 1 | 7 |
| PostvAttitude ² | 5.07 | 1.49 | 1 | 7 |
| Interaction ² | 4.81 | 1.49 | 1 | 7 |
| Presentation ² | 4.52 | 1.53 | 1 | 7 |
| PriorWork ² | 4.11 | 1.19 | 1 | 7 |
| CompanyFit ² | 5.23 | 1.60 | 1 | 7 |
| FormalQual ² | 4.56 | 1.40 | 1 | 7 |
| Woman | 3.60 | 1.19 | 1 | 7 |
| HardSkills | 4.30 | 1.53 | 1 | 7 |
| SoftSkills | 4.61 | 1.67 | 1 | 7 |
| Drug ³ | 2.75 | 1.50 | 1 | 7 |
| Theft ³ | 2.66 | 1.50 | 1 | 7 |
| MultConv ³ | 1.77 | 1.07 | 1 | 7 |
| Prison ³ | 2.48 | 1.32 | 1 | 7 |
| Over2Years ³ | 3.72 | 1.36 | 1 | 7 |
| Gender ⁴ | Male (0) = 273 (74.4); Female (1) = 94 (25.6) | NA | 0 | 1 |
| Age ⁴ | 18-30 years (0) = 31 (8.4); 31-40 years (1) = 77 (21); 41-50 years (2) = 140 (38.1); 51+ years (3) = 119 (32.4) | NA | 0 | 3 |
| Education ⁴ | Not completed secondary school (0) = 44 (12); Completed secondary school, TAFE/Trade, Tertiary = 323 (88). | NA | 0 | 1 |
| WorkRole ⁴ | Employed in business (0) = 154 (42); Business owner (213 (58) | NA | 0 | 1 |
| IndustryStrata ⁴ | Construction & Trade (0) = 189 (51.5); Retail & Services (178 (48.5) | NA | 0 | 1 |
| EmployTotal ⁴ | 1-10 staff (0) = 260 (70.8); 11-20 staff (1) = 56 (15.3); 21-30 staff (2) = 18 (4.9); 31-40 staff (3) = 5 (1.4); 41-50 staff (4) = 6 (1.6); Over 50 staff (5) = 22 (6) | NA | 0 | 5 |
| CrimHiredPos ⁴ | No/negative/neutral experience (0) = 322 (87.7); Positive experience (1) = 45 (12.3) | NA | 0 | 1 |

¹ Variables comprising *HardSkills* composite variable² Variables comprising *SoftSkills* composite variable³ Alternative offence characteristics⁴ Employers reported personal socio-demographics and organisation-context variables

Normality. I examined all continuous and scale variables to check for any non-normal distributions and no issues were detected in this regard. For all dummy or dichotomous variables Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) adopt Rummel's (1970 cited in Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) guidelines to delete dichotomous variables with a 90-10 split or greater. Upon inspection, none of the dichotomous and dummy variables in my dataset violated these parameters and therefore have all been retained for analysis. A table of the descriptive statistics of all variables used in my preliminary and final analyses are displayed in Table 3.5, however only significant predictors in my preliminary analyses were retained for my final models.

Missing data. The Willingness to Hire survey response data was exported from SurveyMonkey into Excel for later use in both STATA 14 and SPSS. I first screened the data for missing responses. Depending on how many variables had missing data, I either imputed values for the missing data or dropped the full case from my dataset. Four variables were identified as having missing data. First, no response was recorded for participants' gender for twenty-seven cases. I manually imputed these before de-identifying the data by cross referencing the survey participants' code with the contact database and determined gender based on the name of the respondent. I performed a mean imputation for the remaining three variables with missing values, which were age (26 missing), education (5 missing) and number of employees (7 missing). Mean imputation involves replacing the missing value with the calculated average of observed values in the dataset (Gelman & Hill, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Analytic Strategy

To address the range of quantitative questions formulated for this thesis, it was appropriate for me to conduct a range of statistical tests. My quantitative analyses include t-tests, Multinomial Logistic Regression (MLR), Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS), simple mediation modelling and serial multiple mediation modelling. For clarification, there is some contention in the literature as to the appropriateness of parametric analyses for ordinal data (derived from Likert items) due to data typically being non-normally distributed (Carifio & Perla, 2008; Jamieson, 2004). However, studies evaluating parametric and nonparametric analyses of ordinal data conclude parametric methods to be robust and reliable (de Winter & Dodou, 2010; Haimson, Swain & Winner, 2011; Frost, 2016; Norman, 2010).

T-tests: Comparing means to detect differences. Using STATA 14, my analyses begin in Chapter Four with paired-sample t-tests to examine whether a criminal record and alternative offence characteristics differentially influence employers' willingness to hire. Paired sample t-tests are appropriate when comparing the means of two experimental conditions within the same group of participants (Zimmerman, 1997). The observed means are compared with the expected means under

a null hypothesis that there is no difference between the two. The t -statistic indicates the extent of the difference and is calculated as per the formula shown below where \bar{X} indicates observed mean and μ indicates population mean. T-tests rely on a p-value of .05 or less to indicate any difference detected is significant.

To calculate the effect size of the paired sample t-tests, I use Cohen's d which provides an estimate of the effect in the population based on the sample. Cohen's d is a standard deviation score calculated by subtracting the mean of the second comparison group from the mean of the first and then dividing by the standard deviation of the baseline comparison group. Cohen (1988) sets the effect size parameter at 0.2 = small; 0.5 = medium; and 0.8 = large.

$$\hat{d} = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{s}$$

MLR. Next, in Chapter Four and also in Chapters Five and Six, I conduct a series of six MLR analyses. Logistic regression is useful for predicting which of two categories or groups someone is likely to belong to on the basis of independent observed information (Field, 2013). MLR is a generalised form of logistic regression for multi-class problems (Okasha & Abu-Saada, 2014), meaning the predicted outcome is characterised by more than two categories or groups. The results of MLR modelling enable the probability of belonging to one category compared to another (Y) to be predicted by the values of the independent variables (X). The outcome variable (Y) of interest for this thesis is the measure of whether or not employers would be willing to hire a job applicant with a criminal record (*Hire2*). *Hire2* is a categorical response variable with $k = 3$ categories representing employers' agreement to hire an ex-offender. The corresponding values of the dependent variable Y take the value y_i ($i = -1$ [disagree]; 0 [neither agree nor disagree]; 1 [agree]):

The probability of Y occurring is represented in the equation below where $P(Y)$ is the probability of Y occurring, e is the base of natural logarithms, b_0 is the constant, b_1 - n are the coefficients associated with the predictor variables (X_1 for a single predictor or X_s for multiple predictors) (Field, 2013):

$$P(Y) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(b_0 + b_1 X_{1i} + b_2 X_{2i} + \dots + b_n X_{ni})}}$$

Conducting MLR analysis requires one category of the outcome variable to be set as the reference category to compare the remaining categories against. For this thesis, the reference category is 'Disagree' on the basis this was the largest response category. MLR analysis provides multiple sets of results depending on the total number of categories in the outcome variable, less the reference

category ($k-1$). *Hire2* has three outcome categories, therefore two sets of results will be provided. MLR results are interpreted as a comparison between the modelled outcome category and the reference. In this instance the analysis provides predictions for employers who ‘neither agree nor disagree’ to hiring an ex-offender, or ‘agree’ to hiring an ex-offender compared to employers who ‘disagree’ to hiring an ex-offender.

For this thesis, the MLR analyses proceeded in a stepwise manner across six models, adding a new independent variable to each model. This enabled me to assess the independent effect of each variable on employers’ willingness to hire and also the extent of overall variance explained by each independent variable. The bivariate relationship between *Race* and willingness to hire, *Hire2*, is tested in Model One and is presented in Chapter Four, along with *Education* and *CrimHiredPos* added to Models Two and Three, respectively. Belief in redeemability is added to Model Four and appears in Chapter Five. In the final results chapter, Chapter Six, the desistance signal proxy measures *HardSkills* and *SoftSkills*, are added to Models Five and Six, respectively. Consistent with stepwise modelling, each subsequent MLR model displayed throughout the three results chapter builds on the one directly before.

Model diagnostics and Goodness of fit. *Pearson’s χ^2* and *Deviance χ^2* goodness of fit statistics assess whether the MLR test is appropriate for the data being analysed. Similar to the Hosmer-Lemeshow test used in binary logistic regression (Hosmer, Taber & Lemeshow, 1991), Pearson and Deviance tests produce a chi-square distribution to compare predicted values to observed values. A non-significant finding indicates predicted and observed values do not differ significantly and therefore the model is a good fit (Allison, 2014).

The *-2 log likelihood ratio chi-square test* is an alternative goodness of fit test. In this instance the chi-square is calculated as the difference between the -2 log-likelihood (-2LL) for the model with and without predictors (McIntosh Fuller, 2012). A statistically significant chi-square indicates the null hypothesis that each of the coefficients are equal to zero is rejected, which means the model is a better fit than the null model. Converse to the *Pearson’s χ^2* and *Deviance χ^2* statistics, statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) findings indicate a good fit (Starkweather & Moske, 2011).

The effect size estimated by the MLR model is indicated by both *Cox & Snell R^2* and *Nagelkerke R^2* . The *Cox & Snell* measure and *Nagelkerke* are both pseudo R-square statistics indicating the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the model (McIntosh Fuller, 2012), based on ‘likelihood’. *Cox & Snell R^2* and *Nagelkerke’s R^2* produce a statistic between 0 and 1, where values closer to 1 indicate the model is useful for predicting the outcome and values closer to 0 indicate the model is not useful for predicting the outcome. *Nagelkerke’s R^2* is considered a more reliable measure of variance that generally produces a larger

test statistic and is therefore more commonly reported. Both measures are reported as proportions. For example, a *Nagelkerke R²* value of 0.334 indicates 33.4% of the variance in the outcome is explained by the model (Burns & Burns, 2009). The *Wald statistic* indicates whether each independent predictor significantly contributes to the outcome. The Wald statistic is also a chi-square distribution, relying on $p < 0.05$ to reject the null hypothesis that each predictor does not contribute to the model (Burns & Burns, 2009). As the stepwise MLR model builds, changes in fit measures indicate whether and how each variable adjustment improves the model.

Assumptions. Unlike linear regression, MLR does not assume normality, linearity or homoscedasticity. A central assumption for linear regression models is that the relationship between the independent variables and the outcome is linear. This assumption is violated when the outcome variable is categorical (Berry, 1993). To address this violation, the non-linear relationship characteristic in logistic regression can be modelled in a linear way using logarithmic terms (*logit*). However, continuous predictor variables in the models must be tested to check for a linear relationship with the log of the outcome (*Hire2*). This is done by creating an interaction variable between any continuous predictor variable in the final model and the log of itself. The full logistic regression model is then conducted including the interaction term. A significant interaction term in this test model indicates the assumption of linearity is violated (Field, 2013). Three continuous predictor variables appear in my final MLR models – *BRGen*, *HardSkills*, and *SoftSkills*. I performed this test for linearity in accordance with Field's (2013) direction and none of the interaction terms are significant ($p > .05$) which confirms the assumption of linearity of the logit is met for all three variables.

Assumptions of independence among dependent variable categories apply to MLR analysis. This means that membership in one category is not related to membership in another on the same dependent variable. One way to test for independence is to check models for multicollinearity (McGaughey, 2017). Field (2013) states the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance post-diagnostic statistics are an adequate measure of multicollinearity for MLR models. To test for multicollinearity, Field (2013) recommends conducting an OLS regression analysis including collinearity statistics with the dependent and all predictor variables included in the MLR model to satisfy these post-diagnostic assessments. Even though OLS regression is not suitable for use with categorical outcome variables, VIF and tolerance statistics can only be calculated as post-diagnostic statistics in OLS regression and therefore permissible for this purpose. To test for multicollinearity, tolerance statistics should not be less than 0.1 (Menard, 1995), VIF statistics should not exceed 10 (Myers, 1990). Table 3.6 below shows the tolerance and VIF scores for the variables in my final MLR model fell within acceptable parameters, indicating there are no problems with multicollinearity.

Table 3.6

Collinearity statistics for all variables in the full Multinomial Logistic regression model

| Variable | Tolerance | VIF |
|--|-----------|------|
| Race | .99 | 1.00 |
| Education | .95 | 1.05 |
| Experience Hiring Ex-offender (CrimHiredPos) | .91 | 1.10 |
| Belief in redeemability (BRGen) | .80 | 1.26 |
| Hard Skills | .40 | 2.55 |
| Soft Skills | .42 | 2.42 |

Dependent variable: Hire2

Interpreting MLR results. In this thesis, the MLR results output contains two sets of statistics – Comparison One and Comparison Two. Comparison One provides the MLR results pertaining to employers who agree they would be willing to hire an ex-offender in comparison to those who disagree. Comparison Two provides the MLR results pertaining to employers who neither agree nor disagree in comparison to those who disagree. The odds ratio (OR) results for each predictor in MLR models indicate the expected change in odds for every one-unit change in the predictor (Field, 2013). In other words, whether the odds of membership in one of the outcome categories in comparison to the reference category is higher, lower or unchanged (i.e. neither agree nor disagree, or agree in comparison to disagree). OR values greater than 1 indicate increased odds the outcome will occur, OR equal to 1 indicates no change in the odds, and an OR value of less than one indicates decreased odds the outcome will occur (Starkweather & Moske, 2011).

OLS. OLS regression is used in Chapter Five to test predictors of belief in redeemability. It was not suitable to continue using MLR in this instance due to the outcome variable, belief in redeemability, being treated as a continuous variable for this particular analysis. Tests for multicollinearity required to be met for OLS have already been satisfied in this chapter. Tests for independence of errors are conducted using the Durbin-Watson test for correlations between errors. It is important this test is satisfied, otherwise a violation of this assumption invalidates the confidence intervals and significance tests in the model. Durbin-Watson statistics range from 0 to 4, where a value of 2 indicates no correlation, less than 2 indicates negative correlation and more than 2 indicates a positive correlation. Although there is no significance test for the Durbin-Watson statistic, a value as close to 2 as possible is optimal (Field, 2013). My OLS model in Chapter Five meets this assumption (Durbin-Watson = 2.04).

Not unlike MLR, OLS analyses whether the outcome (X) can be predicted by the independent variables (Y) in the model. The primary difference between the two is in the interpretation. OLS estimates the proportion of the effect each independent variable has on the outcome. A positive or negative beta coefficient (β) indicates a respective increased or decreased influence on the outcome

given a one-unit change in the associated independent variable. Similar to my MLR model, the OLS regression proceeds in a stepwise fashion across five models. Beginning with *Race* appearing in Model One the remaining sequence of models add *Age* (Model Two), *CrimHiredPos* (Model Three), *HardSkills* (Model Four) and *SoftSkills* (Model Five). Again, this is to test the independent effects of each variable on belief in redeemability and also assess the variance in the overall model explained by each independent variable.

Mediation analyses. As part of my quantitative analyses in Chapters Five and Six I conduct a series of mediation tests to examine whether the relationship between the key variables of interest in this study are influenced by other variables. To accomplish this, simple and serial multiple mediation analyses were conducted using the PROCESS macro in SPSS⁵. Simple mediation is the process whereby a mediating variable *M* intervenes in the relationship between an independent variable *X* and outcome variable *Y* (Hayes, 2013). Or put more simply, the effect of *X* on *Y* occurs through *M*, depicted below as conceptual and statistical diagrams in Figures 3.5 and 3.6, respectively (Hayes, 2013).

Hayes (2012) advises PROCESS limits mediation analysis to models with outcome variables that are continuous, treated as continuous, or binary. To accommodate this limitation, I revert from the recoded categorical outcome variable, *Hire2* (-1 = unwilling to hire; 0 = Neither willing nor unwilling to hire; 1 = willing to hire) back to the original 7-point continuous outcome variable, *Hire2Org* (1 = SD, 2 = MD, 3 = D, 4 = Neither A or D, 5 = A, 6 = MD, and 7 = SD) for the sole purpose of conducting the mediation analyses (see also Iacobucci, 2012). Since mediation analysis is calculated using OLS regression statistics, I also examined the data to ensure the minimum number of two subjects per variable (SPV) is met as required for OLS regression. SPV is calculated by dividing the total number of subjects by the number of predictor variables in the model (Austin & Steyerberg, 2015; Pisello et al., 2017). On the basis of this calculation, the minimum of two SPVs was far exceeded for my analysis:

$$\frac{\text{Sample size}}{\text{No. Independent Variables}} = \frac{367}{6} = 61$$

⁵ Tests for moderation were also conducted but no significant results were found.

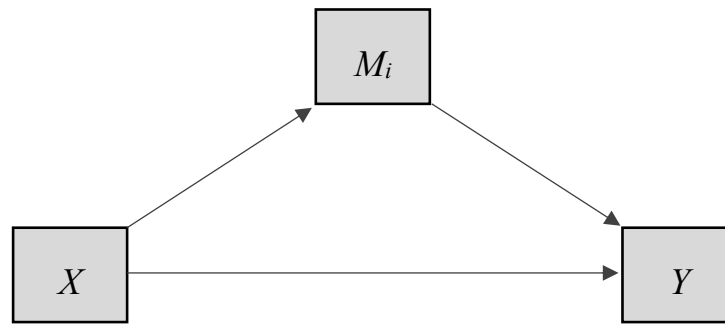


Figure 3.5 Conceptual diagram of a simple mediation model. *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach* (p. 445) by A. F. Hayes, 2013, New York, NY: Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission.

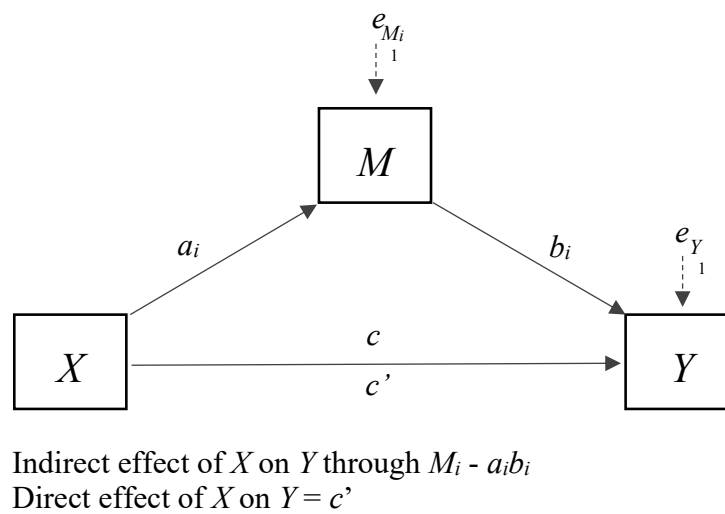


Figure 3.6 Statistical diagram of a simple mediation model. *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach* (p. 445), by A. F. Hayes, 2013, New York, NY: Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission.

Using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2012), mediation analysis was conducted with 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrapped samples. When testing for the indirect effect of mediating variables, bootstrapping the sampling distribution is not reliant upon assumptions about sampling distribution normality, thereby avoiding problems typically associated with non-normal distributions. Bootstrapping procedures estimate the 95% confidence interval (CI), where the absence of zero within the interval indicates the indirect effect is statistically significant from zero at $p < .05$ (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Generally, 5,000 to 10,000 bootstrapped samples are sufficient for mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013). For this thesis, 5,000 bootstrapped samples are used, since no difference in the output was detected when testing with 10,000 bootstrapped samples.

Serial multiple mediation models test a number of effects and allow for more than one mediator to be included in the model to examine the indirect effect of X on Y through each individual mediator, as well as sequentially through multiple mediators, as depicted in Figure 3.7 (Hayes, 2013). As shown in the statistical diagram, Figure 3.8, the specific indirect effect of X on Y through M_i only is equal to $a_i b_i$. The indirect effect of X on Y through M_1 and M_2 in sequence is equal to $a_1 d_{21} b_2$. The direct effect of X on Y is equal to c' in the mediated model after the mediators have been accounted for, whereas the total effect, denoted by *path c*, indicates the relationship between X and Y before accounting for mediators (Hayes, 2013).

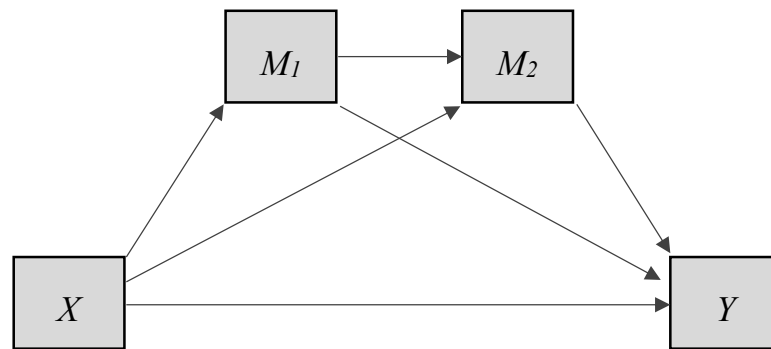
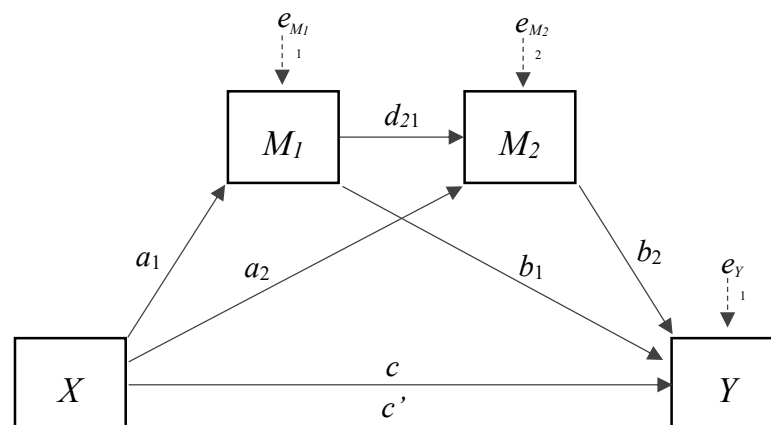


Figure 3.7 Conceptual diagram of a serial multiple mediation with two mediators. *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach* (p. 446), by A. F. Hayes, 2013, New York, NY: Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission.



Indirect effect of X on Y through M_i only = $a_i b_i$
 Indirect effect of X on Y through M_i and M_i in serial = $a_1 d_{21} b_2$
 Direct effect of X on $Y = c'$

Figure 3.8 Statistical diagram of a serial multiple mediation model with two mediators. *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach* (p. 446), by A. F. Hayes, 2013, New York, NY: Guilford Press. Reprinted with permission.

For both simple mediation and serial multiple mediation analysis, three mediation outcomes are possible. First, full mediation is present when the significant association or strength between X and Y in *path c* is lost in *path c'* after accounting for mediators. Second, partial mediation is present when the strength and/or significance reduces from *path c* to *path c'*. Third, an indirect-only mediation effect occurs when neither *path c* or *path c'* are significant, but one or more indirect effects are significant (Hayes 2012, 2013).

Phase Two Qualitative Study: Understanding employers' willingness to hire

The aim of the qualitative study conducted in phase two of this research is to elaborate further on the phase one study. Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989) argue this is one of the purposes of mixed methods research, referred to as *complementarity* where the results from one method enhance or expand on the results of the other. Applied to this research, my qualitative study seeks to provide a deeper contextualised understanding of how employers conceptualise redeemability by way of exploring their own beliefs about redeemability and what they perceive the capacity to change and desist from crime depends upon. A further aim in the qualitative component of this study is to ascertain how employers recognise signals of desistance as a form of communication, guided by Connelly and colleagues' (2011) signalling timeline. Addressing this aim also enables me to assess whether this timeline is a valuable framework for ex-offenders to strategically design and communicate their desistance to employers.

Face-to-face Interview Protocol

A common criticism of mixed methods research is the lack of integration between the two methods and subsequent results (Greene et al., 1989). In such cases, the end product of the research endeavour is two distinct studies, rather than one study which utilises two approaches (Maruna, 2010). Bearing this in mind, the ESMM research designs attend to this as a key part of the integration between phase one and phase two where the results of the quantitative analyses from phase one govern the focus of the phase two interview protocol.

Given the aim of my research in phase two is to explore in greater detail whether beliefs about redeemability and desistance signalling matter for employers in the particular context of being willing to hire an ex-offender, my interview protocol is designed to elicit an understanding of what these concepts mean to employers. Based on the phase one survey findings, I developed a semi-structured interview (SSI) protocol. SSIs are designed to address a specific research problem, guided by the theoretical or conceptual frameworks that govern the research topic, and involve the researcher formulating a set of pre-determined open-ended questions for participants (Given, 2008). SSIs foster a conversation style interview to build some level of rapport with participants and accommodate

flexibility during interviews to allow prompting for more information or clarification by asking additional questions (Ayres, 2008). This was factored into the design of my interview protocol where a set of pre-determined questions were formulated, along with a number of prompts to draw on during interviews if needed (see Appendix 3).

Participant Selection

ESMM with a quan→QUAL design requires “a systematic procedure for selecting participants for qualitative follow-up interviews” (Ivankova, 2014:42), which in my study also constitutes a key point of integration. This improves the credibility of the integrated outcomes transpiring from the quantitative and qualitative phases, as well as connecting the data from both phases through sampling (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Accordingly, upon completion of the phase one survey, participants were informed of the phase two face-to-face interviews and invited to voluntarily register their interest in participating (see last page of Appendix 2). A total of 117 survey participants registered. I credit this large response rate to my personalised recruitment approach (Evans & Mathur, 2005; Scholl et al., 2002), coupled with the foot-in-the-door technique, flagged earlier in this chapter (Freedman & Fraser, 1966).

Since one of the key variables of interest in this thesis is belief in redeemability (Maruna & King, 2009), I sought to interview participants at various points along the belief in redeemability continuum. To facilitate this, I stratified the self-selected sample from phase one into tertiles by belief in redeemability scores using the *xtile* command in STATA 14, which produced three statistically defined groups. Accordingly, I characterised each belief in redeemability tertile as low ($n = 37$; scores 1 to 3.5), mid ($n = 47$; scores 3.75 to 4.25) and high ($n = 33$; scores 4.5 to 6). From each of these groups I randomly selected fifteen interview participants (using the *RANDBETWEEN* Excel command) to generate a total interview sample of $N = 45$.

Recruitment and Procedure

Contact was made with each randomly selected participant using their provided contact details to arrange a convenient time and location for the interview. Interview confirmation was then sent immediately via email, including my own contact details should a re-schedule or cancellation be required. In the event participants declined an interview, I topped up the sample with further random selection until fifteen interviews had been completed for each belief in redeemability group. I interviewed participants from the high redeemability group first which allowed me to gain some insight into what belief in redeemability ‘looks like’ in the context of considering an ex-offender for employment and how associated concepts about desistance from crime are perceived amongst this group. Expanding my own understanding relative to the high belief group at the outset assisted me in

subsequent interviews held with the low and mid belief groups in the sense that I was cognisant of contrasting ideas when they emerged during the course of the interviews and consciously sought to explore these ideas further.

Interviews were held in various locations including participants' private residence ($n = 14$), business premises ($n = 24$), worksites ($n = 2$), and cafés ($n = 5$). As a matter of ethical practice, I adopted a check-in/check-out system when attending private residences where I notified a colleague of the address I was attending, and the anticipated interview start and end time. I made contact via SMS with my colleague to notify them of my arrival to and departure from the interview location. At the outset of each interview, participants were provided with a copy of the Participants Information Guide for the face-to-face interviews and written consent was obtained. Permission was sought and granted by all participants for their interview to be audio recorded for the purposes of later transcription. The average time for each interview was thirty-five minutes.

Transcription. I transcribed each interview into separate documents. Transcriptions were later exported into NVivo 11 for data coding and management. Two interviews from the mid redeemability tertile were dropped as they could not be transcribed due to poor audio quality. Consequently, the overall interview sample was reduced to forty-three. Participants names were replaced with pseudonyms for later reporting. Pseudonyms were created via the Fake Names Generator (Corban Works, 2018) website where pseudonyms are generated on the basis of input gender, age range, and country of origin, and was conducted in accordance with the characteristics of each interview participant. Table 3.7 provides a list of interview participants by their respective pseudonym.

Qualitative Analytic Strategy

Thematic analysis of my qualitative interview data was carried out using a First Cycle and Second Cycle approach (Saldaña, 2013). First Cycle approaches involves applying codes to the interview data followed by the Second Cycle approach where coded data is grouped into thematic categories. For the First Cycle I used *Descriptive* and *In Vivo* coding strategies (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Descriptive codes comprise a word or short phrase applied to chunks of data to describe the idea emerging from that data. In vivo coding uses verbatim words or short phrases adopted directly from the transcribed data to describe the ideas contained within the data. These two coding methods are complementary to each other as sometimes there can be some cross-over. For example, one interview respondent might explicitly articulate 'honesty' (in vivo code) as a valuable personal attribute when making hiring decisions about ex-offenders, whereas another might describe being 'open and upfront' (descriptive code) as a highly regarded quality. In both cases the code 'honesty' would be applied. To conduct this coding, I created thematic nodes using Nvivo and catalogued the interview data according to the corresponding themes as they emerged.

Table 3.7

Interview participant pseudonyms for interview transcripts and reporting

| Redeemability Belief Tertile | Pseudonym | Work Role | Industry Strata* | Age | Gender |
|---|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------|
| Low | Christian Collier | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| Low | Audrey Burford | Owner | R & S | 41-50 | Female |
| Low | Blake Mackie | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| Low | Sebastian Givens | Director | R & S | 41-50 | Male |
| Low | Joel Kingsbury | Owner | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| Low | Timothy Morphett | Owner | R & S | 41-50 | Male |
| Low | Andrew Dakin | Owner | C & T | 31-40 | Male |
| Low | Cameron Lawless | Director | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| Low | Anthony Maas | Owner | C & T | 51+ | Male |
| Low | Jordan Keane | Director | C & T | 51+ | Male |
| Low | Hunter Renard | Owner | C & T | 18-30 | Male |
| Low | Spencer Bland | Manager | R & S | 41-50 | Male |
| Low | Jason Harney | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| Low | Toby Perivolaris | Owner | C & T | 51+ | Male |
| Low | Nicholas Toll | Director | R & S | 41-50 | Male |
| Mid | Jackson Sherriff | Owner | C & T | 51+ | Male |
| Mid | Dominic Murphy | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| Mid | Brodie Wray | Owner | C & T | 31-40 | Male |
| Mid | Jai McCubbin | Director | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| Mid | Alica Varley | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Female |
| Mid | William Schenk | Owner | R & S | 41-50 | Male |
| Mid | Lola Feakes | Human resources | R & S | 41-50 | Female |
| Mid | Mitchell Ahuia Ova | Director | R & S | 41-50 | Male |
| Mid | Isaac Sixsmith | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| Mid | Hugo Mercer | Owner | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| Mid | Rory Busby | Owner | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| Mid | Sam Corey | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| Mid | Caleb Price | Owner | C & T | 51+ | Male |
| Mid | George Camfield | Owner | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| Mid | Alexander Schroder | Manager | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| High | Flynn Lysaght | Owner | C & T | 51+ | Male |
| High | Layla Favenc | Owner | C & T | 51+ | Female |
| High | Harrison Higgs | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| High | Dylan MacDevitt | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| High | Connor Laidley | Owner | R & S | 18-30 | Male |
| High | Gabriel Benstead | Owner | C & T | 51+ | Male |
| High | Mia Rowlandson | Owner | R & S | 51+ | Female |
| High | Ryder Falk | Owner | R & S | 51+ | Male |
| High | Anna Sennitt | Human resources | C & T | 41-50 | Female |
| High | Jamie Goldfinch | Owner | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| High | Justin Huddart | Owner | C & T | 31-40 | Male |
| High | Jonathon Nisbet | Owner | C & T | 18-30 | Male |
| High | Chloe Windich | Owner | R & S | 31-40 | Female |
| High | Hayden Tennant | Administrator | C & T | 41-50 | Male |
| High | Madison Allnutt | Manager | R & S | 31-40 | Female |

*C & T = construction & trade (n = 25); R & S = retail & services (n = 20)

The Second Cycle approach to my thematic analysis involved *Pattern* coding. In pattern coding the descriptive and in vivo codes applied in the First Cycle are examined to identify which codes can be clustered together under a broader theme. For example, codes applied in the First Cycle as honesty, reliability, trustworthiness and positive attitude, could be clustered together as ‘inherent personal qualities’ in the Second Cycle pattern coding. To accomplish this in Nvivo, I created a set of higher-order nodes, referred to as ‘parent nodes’ and aggregated the nodes from the First Cycle, which at this point are now referred to as ‘child nodes’, into broader thematic groups.

Data Reliability and Validity. Reliability in qualitative research is concerned with ensuring the process of the study is methodologically consistent. Whilst scholars suggest a number of ways to ensure reliability, there does not seem to be a one size fits all approach to assessing reliability (Miles et al., 2014). Accordingly, I have assessed the reliability of the qualitative research conducted for this thesis in a number of ways. First, I enlisted the assistance of some volunteers to engage in a preliminary test run of the SSI interview to determine the clarity of questions. Feedback was sought and any points of ambiguity were addressed. In addition, the clarity of questions was also assessed by establishing congruence between my volunteer interviewees in the kinds of responses they provided (Miles et al., 2014). Second, the representativeness of interview participants in relation to the broader study sample was upheld by selecting an equal number of participants from across the spectrum of redeemability beliefs, a key variable of interest in this study (Silverman, 2006). Third, the analysis and reporting of the interview data has been grounded in the theoretical perspectives that govern this thesis (Silverman, 2006).

Hammersley (1990:57) explains validity as “the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers”. One way to assess the validity of qualitative research is by triangulation. Triangulation involves making comparisons between the quantitative and qualitative methods and data collected to assess whether there is corroboration or conflicts between the two. Fielding and Fielding (1986) add that applying a theoretical framework for selecting research methods and collecting data generates insight into the phenomena of interest from the guiding theoretical perspective. On account of the various points of integration which characterise the ESMM design adopted for this thesis, the triangulation of methods, data and findings is organically achieved (Greene et al., 1989).

Presentation of Integrated Results

More recently, scholars have criticised mixed methods research for not adequately integrating data for mixed methods analysis (Bazeley & Kemp, 2012; Bryman, 2007). As my thesis features a number of integration points in line with an ESMM design, it is necessary that I account for these criticisms by way of integrating the findings from my research. Accordingly, I have integrated the

quantitative and qualitative analyses in the results chapters that follow (Lorvick et al., 2012; Walker, 2014) by adopting a “weaving approach” (Fetters, Curry & Cresswell, 2013:2142). The weaving approach is characterised by both quantitative and qualitative findings being presented simultaneously in association with broader themes or concepts (Fetters et al., 2013). Integrating the results from both studies also comprises the second point of integration in my ESMM research design.

To guide this process, I combined the quantitative and qualitative research questions into three distinct question sets. I formulated each set on the basis of connectedness between the quantitative and qualitative questions. Governed by the pragmatist philosophical assumptions and the purpose within ESMM designs for qualitative analysis to explain quantitative findings, connectedness was determined by the complementary nature shared between the questions. In practical terms, this means I combined quantitative questions with qualitative questions into sets with a common theme (see Table 3.8).

Integrated results are presented across three chapters in accordance with the thematic focus of each question set. For each of the three chapters and in keeping with the weaving approach to integrating results, the phase one survey findings are presented first in response to the guiding quantitative question(s), followed by the phase two face-to-face interview findings related to the associated qualitative question(s). Organising the integration of results using this weaving approach facilitates an expanded examination of the survey findings via the interview findings as per the goal of ESMM research design.

In Chapter Four I begin my analysis by examining the influence of an ex-offender job applicant’s race on employment outcomes, as well as whether and how a criminal record makes a difference to employers’ willingness to hire an ex-offender job applicant. I also examine whether a difference in employers’ willingness to hire is apparent when specific characteristics of the ex-offender applicant’s criminal history are altered (i.e. offence chronicity, offence severity, sentence type, time lapse since sentence served). This preliminary examination is important to provide context to the subsequent analyses outlined in Chapter Five, and Chapter Six as to employers’ belief in redeemability, and whether and how desistance signals are instrumental to their willingness to hire an ex-offender over and above factors relating to the applicant’s race and prior criminal history.

Table 3.8

Combined research question sets guiding three thematic integrated results chapters

QUESTION SET 1: How and why a criminal record makes a difference

Quantitative questions

1. Does a job applicant's criminal record differentially influence employers' willingness to hire?
2. What factors predict employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record in the Australian context?
3. Do different offence characteristics independently alter employers' willingness to hire?

Qualitative questions

1. What do offence characteristics signal about an ex-offender?

QUESTION SET 2: Assessing the employability of an ex-offender: Belief in redeemability

Quantitative questions

1. What is the relationship between belief in redeemability and employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record?
2. What predicts a belief in redeemability?

Qualitative questions

1. What characterises the difference between belief in redeemability scores?
2. What do employers perceive the capacity to change depends on?

QUESTION SET 3 Assessing the employability of an ex-offender: Desistance signals

Quantitative questions

1. Do signals of desistance influence an employer's willingness to hire?
2. Do signals of desistance influence the association between belief in redeemability and willingness to hire?
3. Does belief in redeemability influence the association between desistance signals and willingness to hire?

Qualitative questions

1. What kind of desistance signals are valuable to employers in their hiring assessments of job applicants with a criminal record?
 2. How do employers make sense of desistance signals?
-

Chapter Summary

The focus of this thesis is to examine what else matters to employers, beyond a criminal record, when considering an ex-offender for employment. Although there is provision to address many of the educational and vocational deficits that ex-offenders' typically present in order to improve their employability, the ongoing reluctance among employers to hire job applicants with a criminal record suggests there is more to this story that is yet to be uncovered. I have raised the possibility in this thesis that, in the process of assessing the employability of an ex-offender, employers' beliefs about whether or not offenders can change and desist from crime, as well as how employers recognise desistance will matter.

In order to examine this possibility, I have described in this chapter an innovative methodology adopted for my study. Following an ESMM research approach, the quantitative study at phase one has been designed to establish a general understanding of whether and how race and offence characteristics influence employers' willingness to hire, as well as employers' beliefs about ex-offenders, and desistance signalled by ex-offenders. The qualitative study at phase two seeks to elicit a deeper understanding around what a criminal record suggests to employers, how employers conceptualise the capacity for ex-offenders change and the particular ways by which an ex-offender might make his or her desistance known. Together, the purpose for the two phases of my research is to develop a comprehensive understanding about what else matters for employers when contemplating the employability of an ex-offender beyond his or her criminal record.

4. HOW AND WHY A CRIMINAL RECORD MAKES A DIFFERENCE:

An integration of the results

“Everyone wishes to increase their opportunities and be gainfully employed upon graduation. The same opportunity should not be deprived to persons who have already paid their debt.”

Professor Stanley Andrisse, 2017

Endocrinologist, John Hopkins Medicine and Howard University College of Medicine

Former prisoner

Introduction

As highlighted in the literature review, employment outcomes for job applicants with a criminal record are affected by the characteristics of their offending history, such as crime type, crime severity, offending chronicity and time related factors (Holzer et al., 2004; Snider & Reyson, 2014, Varghese, et al., 2010) as well as the ex-offender's race (Pager, 2009). While there is a consistent body of evidence these offence and personal characteristics matter for employers when considering the employability of an ex-offender, much of this research has taken place in the U.S. with only few studies known to consider the Australian context (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey, et al., 2006; Graffam et al., 2008; Holzer et al., 2004; Lukies et al., 2011; Western et al., 2001). The aim of this results chapter is to look beyond current understanding about whether offence characteristics matter to employers and to establish how and why they matter, by addressing the research questions outlined in the first set of questions. The results presented in this chapter lend support to my proposition that employers hiring decisions may be understood with reference to the Impression Formation model in terms of the way automatically activated stereotypes and individuating information differentially influence the willingness of employers to hire ex-offenders.

QUESTION SET 1: How and why a criminal record makes a difference

Quantitative questions

1. Does a job applicant's criminal record differentially influence employers' willingness to hire?
2. What factors predict employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record in the Australian context?
3. Do different offence characteristics independently alter employers' willingness to hire?

Qualitative questions

1. What do offence characteristics signal about an ex-offender?
-

As described in the previous chapter, both my quantitative and qualitative analyses are integrated to address the questions guiding this results chapter. The quantitative analyses in this chapter include hypothesis testing and MLR. Through each of these tests, I found evidence showing how a criminal record matters to employers. I also found significant probabilities between the ex-offender's race, as well as having a positive experience hiring an ex-offender in the past, and employers' willingness hire an ex-offender. I examined further how different offence characteristics either increase or decrease employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender.

Following this, I present my qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews which provides a detailed exploration of employers' subjective understandings around why a criminal record matters for their hiring decisions. The results of the qualitative analysis suggest employers' interpret offence characteristics as a signal of whether or not an ex-offender is considered a risk in the context of assessing his or her suitability for employment. As well as assessing potential risk, employers look to offence characteristics to establish their own perceptions about whether the ex-offender's crime occurred because he or she is inherently prone to offending behaviour, or whether external influences in a particular situation prompted the crime. The former resonates with classical attributions of behaviour, and the latter with positivist attributions of behaviour (Cullen et al., 1985). Both have implications for employers' assessments of the perceived risks ex-offender's pose in association with their suitability for employment.

The Effect of a Criminal Record: Does a Job Applicant's Criminal Record Differentially Influence Employers' Willingness to Hire? (*Quantitative Question 1*)

To assess the extent to which a criminal record matters and how different offence characteristics influence employers' willingness to hire, the first two questions addressed in this results chapter quantify the effects of a criminal record and offence characteristics on employers' willingness to hire. In accordance with the Impression Formation model, the results provide compelling evidence to suggest different offence characteristics automatically activate stereotypes about ex-offenders which is primarily evident in the differential way that offence characteristics influence employers' willingness to hire.

Using a paired-sample t-test, I first examined whether a difference is detected between the two baseline hiring measures. *Hire1Base* measured employers' willingness to hire the hypothetical ex-offender job applicant before his criminal record is disclosed, and *Hire2Base* measured employers' willingness to hire post-disclosure of his criminal record. For both measures, employers rated their agreement in response to the statement "I would hire John for this job" (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = unsure; 7 = strongly agree). The purpose of a t-test is to compare means and test whether differences

between means are statistically significant based on the p-value. A p-value of less than 0.05 suggests there is a statistically significant difference between the means being compared (Stoneman, 2016).

The paired sample t-test comparing *Hire1Base* and *Hire2Base* (Table 4.1), shows that after finding out about an ex-offender's criminal record, employers are statistically less willing to hire ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.40$) compared to their willingness before disclosure of a criminal record ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.22$). The mean difference of -1.23, CI [-1.39, -1.08], was significant $t(366) = -15.66$, $p < .001$ and therefore the null hypothesis of no difference is rejected. Cohen's d represented a large effect size, $d = -1.02$, which means that on average following the disclosure of a criminal record, employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender (convicted of a violent crime and received a community-based order which was completed less than two years ago) reduced by more than one standard deviation.

Table 4.1

Paired-sample t-test for employers' willingness to hire pre- and post-disclosure of criminal record

| Null hypothesis | Mean | SD | df | t | Mean Diff | SE Mean | 95% CI | | Cohen's d |
|-----------------------|------|------|-----|-----------|-----------|---------|--------|-------|-------------|
| | | | | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| Hire2Base = Hire1Base | 3.38 | 1.40 | 366 | -15.66*** | -1.23 | .08 | -1.39 | -1.08 | -1.02 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, Sample size $n = 367$

Predicting Employers' Willingness to Hire: What Factors Predict Employers' Willingness to Hire a Job Applicant with a Criminal Record in the Australian Context? (Quantitative Question 2)

As described in Chapter Two, further to having a criminal record the ex-offender's race and gender (Decker, 2014; Decker et al., 2010; Pager, 2007; Pager & Western, 2009; Visher et al., 2011), the ex-offender's and employer's socio-demographic characteristics (Lukies et al., 2011; Sabol, 2007; Uggen, 2000; Visher et al., 2011), and attributes relative to the organisational context within which an ex-offender may be employed (Lukies et al., 2011), may also predict whether employers would be willing to hire an ex-offender. The first three MLR models examining the effect of *Race*, *Education* and *CrimHiredPos* on *Hire2* (-1 = disagree; 0 = neither agree nor disagree; 1 = agree) appear in this chapter and are presented below in Table 4.2. The analysis builds by adding one variable per model to test for the independent effects of each variable on employers' willingness to hire, net of all other factors.

Table 4.2

Multinomial Logistic regression model predicting the independent effect of Race, Education and CrimHiredPos on employers' willingness to hire (Hire2), for employers who agree (Comparison One), or employers who neither agree nor disagree (Comparison Two), compared with employers who disagree (reference)

| COMPARISON ONE | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | |
|---|---|------------------|------------------|------|------------------|------------------|------|-------------------|------------------|------|
| Willingness to hire by employers who agree ¹ | | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR |
| Race | Indigenous Australian Ref: Caucasian Australian | -0.62* (0.27) | 5.19 | 0.54 | -0.61* (0.27) | 5.04 | 0.54 | -0.69* (0.28) | 5.85 | 0.50 |
| Education | Not completed SS Reference: Completed SS, TAFE, Higher Ed. | | | | 0.61 (0.42) | 2.15 | 1.84 | 0.29 (0.44) | 0.42 | 0.52 |
| CrimHiredPos | Positive experience Reference: No/neutral/neg. experience | | | | | | | 1.62*** (0.39) | 17.18 | 5.04 |
| COMPARISON TWO | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | |
| Willingness to hire by employers who neither agree nor disagree ¹ | | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR |
| Race | Indigenous Australian Ref: Caucasian Australian | -0.09 (0.25) | 0.12 | 0.92 | -0.08 (0.25) | 0.10 | 0.93 | -0.08 (0.25) | 0.10 | 0.92 |
| Education | Not completed SS Reference: Completed SS, TAFE, Higher Ed. | | | | 0.73† (0.38) | 3.77 | 2.08 | 0.73† (0.38) | 3.64 | 2.07 |
| CrimHiredPos | Positive experience Reference: No/neutral/neg. experience | | | | | | | 0.06 (0.46) | 0.01 | 1.06 |
| -2 log likelihood | | | 21.23 | | | 33.84* | | | 56.98*** | |
| Pearson Chi ² | | | 0.00 | | | 0.10 | | | 6.37 | |
| Deviance Chi ² | | | 0.00 | | | 0.10 | | | 8.39 | |
| Cox & Snell | | | 0.02 | | | 0.03 | | | 0.08 | |
| Nagelkerke | | | 0.02 | | | 0.03 | | | 0.09 | |

¹ Reference category is Disagree. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ **Notes:** Test statistics: b = coefficient estimates; Wald χ^2 = chi-square testing null = 0; OR = exponentiated value of the coefficient, interpreted as an odds ratio. Goodness of fit test parameters: *Pearson's* χ^2 and *Deviance* relies on non-significant tests to indicate the model fits the data well; -2LL relies on statistically significant tests to indicate goodness of fit; Effect size statistic: *Cox & Snell* and *Nagelkerke* Pseudo R-squared statistics indicate variance accounted for in the model. Generally, *Nagelkerke's* R^2 is reported as a proportion of variance. Sample size n = 367.

Comparable with other studies reporting the effects of race on employment outcomes for ex-offenders (Harrison & Schehr, 2004; Pager, 2003; Pager & Karafin, 2009; Pager & Western, 2009), Indigenous Australian ex-offenders fared worse than Caucasian Australian ex-offenders. In Comparison One (Table 4.2), the chances employers were willing to hire an Indigenous Australian ex-offender compared to a Caucasian Australian ex-offender were lower for employers who agreed they would be willing to hire than those who disagreed (OR = 0.54, b = -0.62, Wald $\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 5.19$, $p = < .05$). Post-diagnostic statistics indicate this model testing the independent effects of *Race* on hiring outcomes is not a good fit, as demonstrated by a non-significant -2 log likelihood = 21.24; and *Nagelkerke's* R^2 accounting for only two percent of the overall variation in the model. This means that two percent of the variance in employers' willingness to hire is explained by the ex-offender job applicant's race. In Comparison Two, the independent effect of *Race* was not a significant predictor for employers who neither agreed nor disagreed they would be willing to hire compare with those who disagreed.

In Model Two *Education* is added, which refers to the highest level of education completed by the respondent employer. Across both Comparisons One and Two, *Education* was not a significant predictor for employers who agreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed, they would be willing to hire, compared with those who disagreed. In Comparison Two *Education* was found to be approaching significance ($OR = 2.08$, $b = 0.73$, $Wald\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 3.77$, $p < .10$) for employers who neither disagreed nor agreed. In this instance, employers who had not completed secondary education or higher compared to those who had were more likely to neither agree nor disagree, as opposed to disagree that they would be willing to hire an ex-offender. I flag this here in anticipation of further results in the later models found in Chapters Five and Six. In Comparison One, after adjusting for *Education* in Model Two, the strength and significance of *Race* on employers' willingness to hire was maintained from Model One for employers agreeing compared to disagreeing. Fit statistics show an overall improvement of the model with a significant $-2 \log likelihood = 33.84$, $p < .05$, and Nagelkerke's R^2 accounting for three percent of the variation, an increase of one percent from Model One.

Although an applicant's criminal record detrimentally impacts employers' willingness to hire, having had a previous positive experience hiring an ex-offender (*CrimHiredPos*) has the opposite effect, exponentially increasing employers' willingness to hire, as shown in Model Three. This effect only held for employers who agreed they would be willing to hire and not for those who neither agreed nor disagreed. In Comparison One, having had a previous positive experience hiring an ex-offender in the past compared to having none, a neutral or a negative experience, was associated with higher odds that employers agreed they would be willing to hire ($OR = 5.04$, $b = 1.62$, $Wald\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 17.18$, $p = < .001$) than those who disagreed. The standard error appears large; however, this may be explained by *CrimHiredPos* only just falling within the parameters of the 90-10 split for dummy variables (Rummel 1970, cited in Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). With the addition of *CrimHiredPos*, the strength of *Race* marginally increased, but maintained the same significance level and similar odds of being willing to hire ($OR = 0.50$, $b = -0.69$, $Wald\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 5.85$, $p = < .05$). Under Comparison Two, no significant findings or adjustments were found after including *CrimHiredPos* for employers who neither agreed nor disagreed compared to those who disagreed. The overall fit of the model improves again as indicated by $-2 \log likelihood = 56.98$ increasing in significance from $p = < .05$ to $p = < .001$. Having a positive experience hiring an ex-offender accounts for an additional six percent of the variation among employers' willingness to hire, Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.09$.

Testing Whether Offence Characteristic Matter: Do Different Offence Characteristics Independently Alter Employers' Willingness to Hire? (*Quantitative Question 3*)

To address this question, I examined whether and how a range of offence characteristics altered employers' willingness to hire from the baseline post-disclosure (*Hire2Base*) measure. At the baseline measure, employers rated their willingness to hire an ex-offender whose criminal record comprised a violent crime (crime type), single conviction (offending chronicity), a community sentence (sentence type) and a time period of less than two years since the sentence was completed (time factor) (Albright & Denq, 1996; Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Fahey, et al., 2006; Graffam et al., 2008; Holzer et al., 2004; Kurlychek et al., 2006; Snider & Reyson, 2014). Subsequent to rating their willingness to hire post-disclosure of the criminal record, employers were asked to rate whether their willingness would alter (1 = Less willing; 4 = Unchanged; 7 = More willing) under the following different offence conditions: a conviction for a drug offence or theft instead of violence; multiple convictions instead of a single conviction; having served a prison sentence instead of a community sentence; and more than two years of lapsed time since sentence completion instead of less than two years.

Also included in the survey to test the effects of alternative conditions was a question about gender. Respondents were asked to rate how their willingness to hire would alter if the hypothetical applicant was a woman named Jane instead of a man name John (1 = Less willing; 4 = Unchanged; 7 = More willing). This is also included here in this analysis as a test of alternative conditions which have been shown to be influential in other studies (Decker, 2014; Decker et al., 2010).

I conducted a series of paired samples t-tests to compare whether employers' average willingness to hire under each alternative offence condition significantly differed to the corresponding characteristic in the post-criminal record disclosure condition, *Hire2Base* ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.40$). Overall, the results in Table 4.3 show that on average, employers were less willing to hire on all alternative offence measures, except under the condition that more than two years has lapsed since the completion of the sentence or when the ex-offender is female.

Based on mean comparisons, employers are less willing to hire an ex-offender with a conviction for *Drugs* ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 1.50$, Bca 95% CI [-.83, -.43], $t(366) = 6.13$, $p < .001$) or *Theft* ($M = 2.66$, $SD = 1.50$, Bca 95% CI [-.92, -.52], $t(366) = 7.20$, $p < .001$) than a violent offence. The mean difference between *Theft* and *Hire2Base* is represented by a medium effect size, $d = -.52$, which means that employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender with a conviction for theft instead of violence reduces by more than half a standard deviation. The mean difference between *Drugs* and *Hire2Base* is represented by a small to medium effect size, $d = -.45$, which means employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender with a drug conviction instead of violence reduces by almost half a standard deviation.

Table 4.3

Paired samples t-test comparing means between employers' willingness to hire post-criminal record disclosure and all other alternative conditions

| Null hypothesis | Mean | SD | df | t | Mean Diff | SE Mean | 95% CI | | Cohen's <i>d</i> |
|-----------------|------|------|-----|----------|-----------|---------|--------|-------|------------------|
| | | | | | | | Lower | Upper | |
| Hire2Base = | 3.38 | 1.40 | 366 | | | | | | |
| Theft | 2.66 | 1.50 | 366 | 7.20*** | -.73 | .10 | -.92 | -.52 | -.52 |
| Drug | 2.75 | 1.50 | 366 | 6.13*** | -.63 | .10 | -.83 | -.43 | -.45 |
| MultConv | 1.77 | 1.07 | 366 | 20.62*** | -1.62 | .08 | -1.78 | -1.46 | -1.15 |
| Prison | 2.48 | 1.32 | 366 | 11.03*** | -.90 | .08 | -1.06 | -.74 | -.64 |
| Over2Years | 3.72 | 1.36 | 366 | -4.15*** | .34 | .08 | .18 | .50 | .24 |
| Woman | 3.60 | 1.18 | 366 | -2.77** | .22 | .08 | .06 | .38 | .16 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, Sample size $n = 367$

Out of all the alternative offence conditions, the largest difference detected is between *Hire2Base* and *MultConv* ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 1.07$, BCa 95% CI [-1.78, -1.46], $t(366) = 20.62$, $p < .001$). The mean difference between *Hire2Base* and *MultConv* is represented by a large effect size, $d = -1.15$ which means that on average employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender with multiple convictions reduces by more than one standard deviation than if the ex-offender had a single conviction. Having served a *Prison* sentence ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.32$, BCa 95% CI [-1.06, -.74], $t(366) = 11.03$, $p < .001$), also has a large effect, reducing employers' willingness to hire by more than half a standard deviation, $d = -.64$, compared to serving a community-based sentence as described for *Hire2*. In contrast, having had a time lapse of more than two years since completing a sentence had a positive, although small, effect on employers' willingness to hire, $d = .24$. In this case, the mean difference between *Over2Years* ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.36$, BCa 95% CI [.18, .50], $t(366) = -4.15$, $p < .001$) and *Hire2Base* is statistically significant, with employers' willingness to hire increasing by almost one-quarter of a standard deviation for ex-offenders who have been discharged from their sentence more than two years prior.

The final test conducted here is not an offence characteristic but measures the effect of the ex-offender's gender on employers' willingness to hire (Decker, 2014; Decker et al., 2010). In this instance, a significant difference was detected between the *Hire2Base* measure relating to John in the vignette description and *Woman* ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.18$, BCa 95% CI [.06, .38], $t(366) = -2.77$, $p < .01$) relating to Jane, being the alternative condition measuring whether gender would matter for employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender. This measure for the effects of gender returns a smaller significance value as well as the smallest effect size of all the alternative conditions, $d = .16$, which

suggests the difference measured here is regarded as trivial, even if the test is significant (Walker, 2008).

The evidence presented and discussed here provides empirical support for what has been consistently reported in previous literature that offence characteristics differentially influence employers' willingness to hire (Albright & Denq, 1996; Atkin & Armstrong, 2013; Fahey, et al., 2006; Graffam et al., 2008 Holzer et al., 2004; Kurlychek et al., 2006; Snider & Reyson, 2014). Replacing each individual offence characteristic described within the vignette in turn with an alternative offence characteristic enabled me to establish a hierarchy of offence characteristics that matter to employers. The aggregate picture shows having multiple convictions has the greatest effect on reducing employers' willingness to hire. A longer lapse of time after the completion of a sentence, on the other hand, has the greatest effect on improving employers' willingness to hire. The remaining alternative offence conditions examined in this thesis – *Drugs*, *Theft*, and *Prison* – all influence a significant decrease in the willingness of employers to hire an ex-offender job applicant. Whether an ex-offender is female instead of male has very minimal effect on altering the willingness of employers to hire. In the next section of this chapter, the findings from the phase two interviews suggest employers' reluctance to hire because of particular offence characteristics is associated with anticipated risks in the workplace, as well as the reasons employers believe an ex-offender may have offended in the first place, which also informs their risk assessments.

The Meaning of a Criminal Record to Employers: What Does a Criminal Record Signal About an Ex-offender to Employers? (*Qualitative Question 1*)

This research question aims to elicit an understanding of employers' perceptions about the employability of job applicants with a criminal record. Here I turn to the qualitative results, offering further insight into the survey results about why offence characteristics differentially influence employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender. Two key considerations emerged as the primary focus for employers to assess the suitability of ex-offender job applicants. The first is whether employing an ex-offender would present risks to themselves, their staff, customers or their business reputation. Employers speculated they would base their assessments on the characteristics contained within an ex-offender's criminal record and what those characteristics signal in terms of perceived risks. A large majority of these concerns however, were more prevalent amongst employers in the construction and trade industry, who described the potential for workplace dynamics to be tense at times and possibly provoke a further offence. Additionally, because employees are granted greater levels of trust with work equipment and business assets, the perceived risks are also amplified.

The second key consideration identified by employers is to make sense of why the applicant engaged in offending behaviour. It is here that I find further support for the applicability of the

Impression Formation model and in particular the second component, individuating information, as it relates to why employers are willing or not willing to hire an ex-offender. Employers report a tendency to understand offending behaviour in two distinct ways. First, as being driven by the ex-offender's internal motivations to offend and therefore a manifestation of their inherent character and a signal of their blameworthiness. Second, because of external circumstances that provoked the offending behaviour, signalling the ex-offender cannot be held entirely responsible. These two perspectives align with classical (inherent character) and positivist (external influence) attributional explanations of behaviour, respectively (Cullen et al., 1985) and provide employers with the individuating information necessary for understanding the context around why the offending occurred in the first place.

By drawing on attributional explanations of crime to make sense of offending behaviour, employers describe classical attributions as having an amplifying effect on negative stereotypes because of the ex-offender's perceived culpability in the offending behaviour. Conversely, positivist attributions tend to attenuate negative stereotypes where the ex-offender is viewed as less blameworthy for the offending behaviour, resulting in employers' being more open to the prospect of hiring a job applicant with a criminal record. This propensity to draw on attributional explanations features more prominently amongst employers from retail and services industries. This may be due to qualities about who the ex-offender is or how they have responded to external pressures being signalled by a criminal record, and how these qualities translate (or not) to working in retail and services type jobs where greater interaction with the public takes place compared to the construction and trade industries.

The criminal record: A signal of potential risks, work capabilities and past mistakes.

One of the earlier questions I asked employers during the face-to-face interviews was 'what kind of employee do you think someone with a criminal record would make?' In response, employers discussed a range of broader concerns about the possible implications associated with employing an ex-offender in terms of the organisational context in which he or she would be working, as well as the appropriateness of employing a job applicant with a criminal history in light of the various concerns employers held. Reflecting what has been reported in previous literature (Lam & Harcourt, 2003; Lukies et al., 2011), employers expressed concerns that were largely related to the type of crime committed in connection with the anticipated risks to the safety and security of staff, customers, and the business. Some employers, however, felt that having a criminal record does not signal anything about the kind of employee an ex-offender would make.

Depending on the type of crime that was committed, for some employers a criminal record can signal the ex-offender has poor emotional management skills. This raises concerns about the potential

for workplace dynamics to trigger a further offending episode. In Dominic's response he considers the personal challenges that may have underpinned the initial offence and how these may resurface in the work environment if things do not go to plan:

If it was an assault or a...um...you know is there anger issues there? How is he going to...how would he...how would he perform in a situation where something went wrong on the job and something just went wrong and he couldn't conduct himself properly because he had an anger management problem or something like that...that's something that would concern me, you know? (Dominic, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

A criminal record essentially serves as a testament to what an ex-offender is capable of in terms of offending behaviour (Maruna, 2012; Pager, 2007). For this reason, any kind of relation between the types of work the ex-offender might undertake and the type of crime for which they have been convicted raises questions for some employers about whether the job applicant may be likely to repeat that offence within the context of their business. The example in Jason's response below illustrates the point that some jobs would be more suitable than others for an ex-offender with a particular type of offence history in order to avoid placing the ex-offender in situations where he or she could reoffend in the same way against the employer and their business:

Like I said, it depends on what crime they've done. If they've embezzled, it doesn't matter if they're a boiler maker, it doesn't...if they're a boiler maker and they end up being in management and they're embezzling money and whatever else like that, I would have a different view on it, but if they came and applied as a boiler maker and they've been convicted of that, they're not going to be around any money or any sort of situation like that, you'd keep them at a distance until you observe them... you know? (Jason, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

A particular type of criminal record also signals a particular type of perceived risk. Depending on what the ex-offender's criminal history entails, employers perceive different types of risk to others within the working environment or the security of the business itself. For this reason, exercising a duty of care to preserve the safety of staff and customers and others associated with the business is a priority for some employers, as is protecting the business assets. As an example, Blake is one employer who felt any risk to the safety and security within or to the business was not worth taking:

. . . if someone had a sexual thingo [offence], be no way they'd be able to work here because my wife's here, my two kids are often here, they're only young, you know? So, these days I'd have to be very aware of that as well. You know, sometimes they (employees) even drop our kids places for us so... you know what I mean? So they'd have to be, you know if they didn't have a licence or been done for dangerous driving...those kind of things well it would make it hard too because the job involves driving as well as the trust. And of course if they've ever done embezzlement or anything like that, they handle money here and like I said to you before we're not often here [...] So that has to be reliable as well. Often people pay them at their end, they have to bring the money back and stuff like that. But they often can write the invoices off as well, so...you know it'd be hard to track, it would be easy for them to take small amounts. (Blake, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

While the suggestion of hiring an ex-offender raised some considerations to be made for some employers, bringing the ex-offender's capacity to do a job into question, others felt that having a criminal record is not a signal of whether or not an ex-offender is capable of doing a job. Employers claiming a criminal record is of little or no consequence placed greater emphasis on whether the ex-offender can work productively, rather than his or her criminal record. Isaac dismissed the idea that a criminal record would matter to him personally, partly because of the type of industry in which he works:

I couldn't care...personally. I couldn't care who or what the person is as long as they do the job, show up and not cause hassles [...]. No different to anyone else. [...] we're in the trade industry, so we're sort of different to say a traditional white collar [...] I don't care, I really couldn't give a rats arse. (Isaac, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Echoing a similar sentiment, Justin suggests that as far as hiring considerations are concerned, a criminal record is not a signal that differentiates one applicant from another and therefore hiring someone with a criminal record would not be any different to hiring someone without a criminal record. The insinuation in Justin's response is that neither one potential employee's job application nor another's criminal record are reliable signals to gauge his or her employability value:

[...] what's the difference of employing some bloke you don't know that's applied for a position off the internet or the newspapers? That...he lives at home with his two dogs and his wife and kids and then the criminal bloke who has been convicted of grievous bodily

harm who lives at home with his two dogs and his wife and his kids, what's the difference?
(Justin, aged 31-40, business owner, construction and trade industry)

When talking with employers about whether a criminal record would signal any concerns about hiring an ex-offender, a threat to the integrity of the business name was raised by a number of employers. As well as the business reputation, there were also wider ramifications beyond an employer's own business that were raised, such as damage to associated companies or the loss of trust in the fundamental business practices, as described by Andrew:

[...] theft is the other big thing, Sue, because the type of work that we do, we're going into people's homes, we have to be trusted and I worked for a lot of different insurance companies and if someone did steal something or something like that happened on one of our jobs, it's not only me but it's also their name [...] that's the thing that I've gotta be specifically mindful of what we do. (Andrew, aged 31-40, business owner, construction and trade industry).

Apart from the perceived risks signalled by an ex-offender's criminal record, employers expressed concerns that having a criminal record indicates there may be limits to ex-offenders being able to work at full capacity. In this regard, some concerns were raised about possible restrictions placed on the ex-offender because of the type of criminal record he or she held that would become an imposition on the employer in terms of work productivity. Mitchell describes this as particularly problematic for small businesses that are unlikely to be in a position to facilitate such restrictions:

[...] in a small business, they're [ex-offenders] not suitable because the requirements for the hoops they have to jump through...and I understand these requirements, is such that it impacts on a small business [...]. I have to have someone that can...the minute that they walk through that front door...is capable of doing anything that I ask. Not... 'well I can do this, but I can't do that...I can go here, but I can't go there'. (Mitchell, aged 41-50, director, retail and serviced industry)

It seems expected that a criminal record would be a negative signal to employers about what kind of employee an ex-offender would make. Later in the face-to-face interviews, I also asked employers if a criminal record might signal the ex-offender applicant as providing some level of benefit to the employer. This line of questioning was motivated by employers who have hired an ex-offender in the past and attest to the experience as being positive (Goodstein, 2018; Lockhart, 2012). Some of the employers in my study struggled to identify what those benefits might be, like Sebastian,

who stated that the benefits of hiring an ex-offender would be “no different to anyone else [...] there’d be no advantages at all”. Other employers, like Anthony, speculated with some uncertainty there may be some financial benefits, but overall seemed unconvinced:

[...] not unless the government gave handouts for hiring people, you know like...like somebody who had a record, like someone who had been long-term unemployed or Aboriginal...I don’t know whether you can get those financial incentives, but I can’t think of any reason other than that. (Anthony, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Nonetheless, others reported expectations that were similar to employers’ experiences recounted retrospectively in Goodstein’s (2018) USA study. In his study, employers stated that by hiring ex-offenders labour demands are met, ex-offenders are assisted in their resettlement, and the wider community is safer with less crime. The employers in my study also anticipated how employing an applicant with a criminal record might be of some benefit to their own business, whilst also benefitting the ex-offender or the community. What was particularly interesting where benefits in hiring an ex-offender were identified was the noticeable difference in responses between male and female respondents. Male respondents typically perceived any anticipated benefits to be associated with the ex-offender’s work capabilities rather than having a criminal record. This is illustrated in Andrew’s response below, emphasising the value of any work skills the ex-offender may have, whilst dismissing how a criminal record might signal anything of particular benefit:

I wouldn’t say there’s any benefits in hiring someone with a criminal record, there’d be benefits in hiring that person for the individual skills they’ve got, yeah...having a criminal record is neither here nor there...it’s...it’s sort of irrelevant really it’s more what the person can do. (Andrew, aged 31-40, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Caleb was one exception who stated “They learn and all of a sudden they become independent, they become um...an important part of the community, they’re doing something, they’re part of the team, you know?”

Female employers were distinctly more altruistic in their perspectives compared to males. Recent research supports this tendency for females to subscribe to a more altruistic response (Rand, Brescoll, Everett, Capraro, & Barcelo, 2016). Rand and colleagues (2016:6) argue that because of social norms whereby females are heavily invested into caring for their young, they occupy roles that require “communal and self-sacrificing behaviour,” and in turn are more intuitively altruistic than

males in the context of responding to social situations. This inclination towards altruism is upheld by the findings in this thesis where a job applicant's criminal record signals an opportunity to female employers, in particular, to be actively involved in the ex-offender's reintegration. From Layla's perspective, by helping one ex-offender they may help another, like paying it forward. Audrey, on the other hand, felt that facilitating an opportunity for an ex-offender far outweighed how she might feel about it or the regret of not giving someone a second chance:

The benefit would be watching them grow up and get through their training and being a responsible adult and then they will therefore take that with them, the reward, and see how they've turned out and that will give them a chance. And therefore, they'll do the same thing, you would like to think that they'll sort of go "well, someone gave me a chance, I'm going to give someone else a chance. So it will sort of... do like... a complete circle. (Layla, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Benefits? There's always going to be a person who is completely reformed, who needs a chance [...] if I was given the opportunity to do something like that, then I'd be nervous, nervous as all hell, but I don't want to get to the end of my life and go 'I didn't give somebody a chance, because I had a preconceived idea of what they were going to do or how they were going to stuff up'. (Audrey, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

The criminal record: A signal of inherent character.

Characteristics of the ex-offender's criminal history and what these characteristics signal to some employers at face value are closely associated with classical attributions of crime (Cullen et al., 1985). This has implications for the willingness of those employers to hire an ex-offender due to offending behaviour being seen as the rational choice of an intrinsically criminal person. Employers who subscribe to this idea explain the proclivity to offend in terms of an individual's criminogenic tendencies; physiological needs such as addictions; psychological conditions such as personality; or biological makeup such as genetics. Regardless of the particular explanation employers adopt, the common underlying attitude amongst those applying classical attributions is that people who commit crime are driven to do so because it is within their innate character.

Employers perceived an ex-offender in terms of an offender typology and whether this matters for employment. In this regard, the offence characteristics, such as the type of crime committed or offending chronicity (i.e. multiple convictions), signals what type of offender the applicant is and therefore who the ex-offender is as a potential employee. Distinguishing between crimes by

seriousness is the focal point for some employers to determine whether the ex-offender's criminal history is a reasonable indication of his or her inherent character. In this instance, employers draw comparisons between crime types and weigh these up in terms of whether one crime indicates a more tolerable character compared to another crime type that may indicate a less tolerable character. In Justin's example, a criminal record that is directly associated with the ex-offender's previous employment is a stronger indicator that he or she is a risky person to employ compared with another seemingly unrelated crime in a different setting. Justin determines offender types by the crime committed and ranks these on a hierarchy of seriousness where one offender type is perceived as worse than another:

[...] if someone has been a violent offender and been in a pub fight, it's a different scenario, so you know, if they've been aggravated or they've caused an aggravated assault, that's a completely different thing to being...um...stealing from a workplace. If someone had got a criminal record from [*sic*] stealing from an employer or stealing money, it's a completely different...in my...as a business owner, it's a completely different scenario and is worse than someone being a violent offender. (Justin, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Ryder also differentiates between crime type seriousness and offender typologies, making a clear distinction between who a person is as opposed to what they have done. In his narrative, Ryder indicates some crime types are directly connected with a classical attribution regarding who the ex-offender is (i.e. an axe murderer or child molester), while other crime types are merely an indication of a past behaviour (i.e. got drunk and stole something). Both cases signal different implications for whether or not an ex-offender would be suitable to have in the workplace:

[...] you can have an axe murderer and you can have someone who has just got drunk and stole something, both have got a criminal record, both completely different levels of criminality...um...you know, I mean if you've got...I wouldn't like to employ a child molester or a murderer, I'd probably be a bit wary, you know, if it's a severe....sort of...if there was any element of psychotic or sociopathic behaviour there I probably wouldn't want to be around them [...]. (Ryder, business owner, retail and services industry)

Reflecting back on the literature presented in Chapter Two, employers reportedly value job applicants who reflect personal qualities such as motivation, reliability, and having a willingness to learn (Bloom, 2012; Holzer, et al., 2002; Visher et al., 2008). In this study, employers also identify a number of offence characteristics they perceive to be tell-tale signs of an ex-offender's innate

qualities that align with or stand in stark contrast to those that employer's cite as having some appeal. In the quote that follows, Connor compares two types of offenders who may have spent time in prison but distinguishes one from the other on the basis of their personal qualities. Despite the fact that Connor's first example refers to an ex-offender's loyalty being the catalyst for his or her offending, loyalty is also a quality cited by employers as being the marker of a good worker (Lockhart, 2012). On the contrary, a different criminal history may signal an ex-offender who lacks ambition and appears to employers as unmotivated. More important to Connor is whether the personal qualities of the individual that are perceived to drive their offending behaviour are favourable in the context of what makes a good employee:

Well for whatever reason (a person is in jail), that would be the best possible scenario of loyalty to whatever he happened to be loyal to and he would probably make a good employee, I guess. More so than...the guy who's you know, not paid his drink driving fine or you know, just a no-hoper that you know, is in jail because he's just hopeless I guess. Like I would have no interest in employing that type of person whatsoever. (Connor, aged 18-30, business owner, retail and services industry)

In a similar vein, an ex-offender with multiple convictions on their record may signal to employers they are unable or unwilling to learn, or that perhaps their inclination to persist with offending behaviour is simply a manifestation of an innate criminogenic character. In discussion with Lola about what a criminal record suggests about a person, her response below demonstrates that some offence characteristics are indicative of who the ex-offender is:

[...] if it is a repetitive thing then that tells you a lot about their character because they're continuing to do and make the same mistakes or they're deliberately doing things where they don't see it as a mistake, they just see it as a way of life, so that tells you a lot about them. (Lola, aged 41-50, human resources, retail and services industry)

Contrary to other qualities employers value when assessing the employability merits of an ex-offender, such as being reliable, offending behaviour can signal that an ex-offender lacks restraint over his or her own behaviour. Signals of poor self-control emerged in the data in two distinct ways. The first relates to the type of crime, as illustrated by Christian's quote below. The second relates to physiological issues, such as an addiction, that are outside the scope of the ex-offender to be able to control, as per Flynn's response. Although both examples consider a lack of self-control from different perspectives, both are essentially grounded in explanations of crime being underpinned by some innate quality of the individual:

Oh well I mean obviously if they've hurt someone or whatever, they find it pretty hard to control themselves, it's basic and straight forward isn't it? Yeah, so... if they physically harm someone in any way, they haven't got very good self-restraint or control, you know? Self-discipline. (Christian, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

You know...um...I know a lot of drug, a lot of people involved who get caught with drugs I know they're multiple offenders...um... that in a lot of cases is probably the sign of a bloody addictive behaviour, you know, people get that shit. My uncle's an alcoholic, he can't help it. (Flynn, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Stoll (2009) suggests a criminal record may flag the ex-offender as having an untrustworthy character. In this study, employers identified specific offence characteristics contained within a criminal record as signals of the ex-offender job applicant's trustworthiness. When talking about trustworthiness, employers emphasised this being associated with the context of the working environment in which an ex-offender may work and whether this has consequences for the type of job for which the ex-offender is being considered:

It's a tough one, if it's [the crime] trust related... if you think you can't trust someone in a small team like this, you definitely can't use them, right, cos often on a Saturday we work on our own and I try not to work Saturdays, so I trust the guys to do it, so you know if you can't trust them to be here with the till and taking money from customers and that sort of thing, then they're no good to you. Trust is the main thing. (Jonathon, aged 18-30, business owner, construction and trade industry)

I think it matters a great deal if you feel you can't trust a person. So if you look at a person and you think "well, you've made one mistake and I think that it was a mistake, a genuine mistake, and you've paid your penalty for making that mistake", then it doesn't damage your trust in a person, but if they continuously make these same mistakes or make these same choices, then you just can't trust that they're not going to continue to do that, so it makes it really hard to lay that all aside and say "Ok, I'm going to trust you, I'm going to put you in a position here, where, in our circumstance, that bar in particular has thousands of dollars worth of alcohol there that could easily walk out the door" (Lola, aged 41-50, human resources, retail and services industry)

In some cases, employers interpret the offence characteristics contained within an ex-offender's criminal record as an expression of the individual's underlying psychological state. Audrey describes

the inclination for some offenders to commit particular types of crime being driven by their personality. Thus, the type of crime noted on the criminal record may suggest what type of personality the ex-offender possesses and acts as a signal of who the person is:

I think it [offending] has a lot to do with their personality, because those crimes [against children] are predatory and I think that's planned and manipulated and to me that tells me about their personality, they are...as opposed to opportunistic. (Audrey, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

Taking a slightly different angle concerning the ex-offender's psychological state, Flynn considers a chronic offending history signals low intellect. In Flynn's response, there is also a connection between intellect and ability to learn, which resonates with the personal qualities employers cite as favourable. This is exemplified by Flynn's perception that those who repeatedly offend are not demonstrating an ability to learn. He reaches this conclusion on the basis they are likely to be receiving multiple consequences and therefore they must not have the intellect to avoid those consequences by altering their behaviour:

Obviously I'm going to look at them...if they're multiple, how multiple? How stupid are they? I mean, you know... How many times do you have to be hit with a stick to know that it's going to hurt you? (Flynn, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

There was overwhelming agreement amongst the majority of employers that having committed a sexual offence is a clear indication of the ex-offender's innate character and, as a result, classical attributions were applied to understanding sexual offending. Employers perceive that sexual offending occurs because of some inherent biological condition and is therefore a permanent feature of the person's character. The assumption made by some employers is that sexual offending is an outworking of a genetic predisposition to behave that way, so the tendency to sexually offend will always be there. It is possible that this leads employers to align with popular public opinion that sex offenders re-offend at very high rates, even though this is contrary to the evidence (Harris & Hanson, 2004; Levenson, Brannon, Fortney & Baker, 2007). This leaves employers with an unwillingness to engage ex-offender job applicants with a history of sexual offending:

If some bloke turned around and said "I'm on the sex offender's register"... you don't stand a chance. Don't care whether it's children or women or what, because I think that sort of thing...that's within them [...] anyone on a sex register or something like that, I

think that's just in their make-up [...] I reckon any of those strange sexual proclivities, I think that's almost genetic. (Cameron, director, retail and services industry)

For other employers, a history of sexual offending signals a morally abhorrent individual with whom employers have no desire to associate. Consequently, employers' sense of moral indignation is incited towards the prospect of hiring someone who has sexually offended. Even though any anticipated risk may be unrelated to the work environment or others within it, employers' opposition to hiring an ex-offender with a sexual offending history has more to do with the 'type' of person who commits sexually based offences. Across a number of studies and over time, scholars have repeatedly identified that according to public opinion, sex offenders are the most despised offenders, over and above all other offender types and are therefore the subject of the most intense public punitive attitudes (see for example Geraghty, 2007; Lancaster, 2011; Sampson, 1994; Simon, 1998; Zilney & Zilney, 2009). In line with previous scholarship, both examples below demonstrate employers' vehement refusal to even consider a job applicant with a sexual offending history:

[...] if it was a pedophile, I'd probably say no and get really upset [...] that type of thing I wouldn't have a bar of it. And it's back to the trust issue we have, my wife comes in here and at times she's on her own with one of the workers or a few of the workers, so I'd be a bit funny about that. (Jackson, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

I understand that it [paedophilia] is a sickness, but keep away from me, so I just...there's things that you allow into your life and things that you don't allow into your life, so you know that'd be one of them that'd be right there. (Mia, aged over 51, business owner, retail and services industry)

Aside from the type of crime committed, employers also attribute classical explanations to their understanding of why people offend on the basis of a person typology. In this regard, some employers tend to view offenders as the type of people who would commit crime and a criminal record is therefore a signal of a person who is inclined to offend. For instance, Sebastian describes the innate nature of a person to be the motivating factor for his or her offending, suggesting that crime is committed by certain types of people:

But you'll get certain types of people with a criminal record that are always going to contribute to that record, there's going to... you know, the record is there to be broken

and they're going to try and break that record, it's just the nature of the animal, you know what I mean? (Sebastian, aged 41-50, director, retail and services industry)

Conversely, Johnathon's testimony of his own experience is that a criminal record does not reliably signal anything about the person who holds it, and therefore has little bearing on his willingness to hire. Johnathon's quote also provides added support for the earlier findings in my quantitative analysis that having had a positive experience hiring an ex-offender at some time in the past exponentially increases a willingness to hire:

[...] I've worked with plenty of people with criminal records in my time before I was...owned a business, and they're some of the best people I know, so it's not a, like it's not a big cross for me if someone has that. (Johnathon, aged 18-30, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Employers aligning with the idea that having a criminal record signals an ex-offender as inherently criminogenic tend to draw these conclusions based on what is known about his or her criminal record at face value alone. Consequently, employers make stereotypical assumptions about the inherent nature of the ex-offender and the risks they may pose, which then generally has a negative influence on their willingness to hire. The association between classical attributions and willingness to hire in the absence of knowing the context of the crime is similar to the way stereotypes influence the formation of impressions about others (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982). This inclination to draw conclusions about others based on minimal, objective information is strongly supported by other studies that show first impressions occur very quickly and are often underpinned by automatically activated stereotypes (Bar, Neta & Linz, 2006; Willis & Todorov, 2006). Alternatively, employers who are open to considering broader contextual factors associated with offending behaviour (positivist attributions), are less inclined to view a criminal record as a definitive signal of who the ex-offender is and in turn, express a greater willingness to hire.

The criminal record: A signal of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Employers are open to the idea that a criminal record may signal an ex-offender job applicant was provoked to offend because of the particular circumstances he or she were in at the time of the offence. Aligning with positivist attributions of behaviour (Cullen et al., 1985) some employers perceive offending behaviour as not so much a manifestation of an individual's personal character (classical), but rather a response or reaction within a situation where external sources of influence prompt an individual to behave in a criminal way. In turn, the offending behaviour may be perceived as a mistake given the circumstances, rather than the offence being motivated by an innately bad

person. The knock-on effects of this is that circumstantial context can signal the ex-offender as less culpable for the crime and demonstrate a greater extent of empathy among employers with respect to whether or not they would be willing to hire.

Understanding the context around why the ex-offender job applicant's offending occurred has benefits for both the employer and the ex-offender. For employers, having some idea about what was happening in the ex-offender's life at the time to prompt his or her offending behaviour allows employers to gain some insight into why the crime occurred. Nicholas draws on the example of an assault charge to illustrate the importance of understanding the context in which offending occurs. He alludes to the possibility that an offence that seems serious at face value, may in fact be justifiable under the circumstances:

[...] if I was employing somebody I'd want to know, exactly what the assault charge was. Um... and depending on the background of it, I'd probably look at that person really, because that's different to stealing. You know assault is.... Assault is normally aggravated by something, you know like...If you...if I...well you know, you're married, if you have a fight with your husband, you know it's aggravated by something, you know, regardless of what it is, sometimes its...Yeah something's triggered that response, and assault can be an innocent person being up for assault, you know and they're just defending their right. (Nicholas, aged 41-50, director, retail and services industry)

Also mitigating the ex-offender's culpability is the extent to which the circumstances surrounding the offence were within the ex-offender's control, but also because the individual has wound up with a criminal record on account of circumstances, due to minimal fault of their own. There was a sense among some employers, like Toby, that in these cases the imposition of a criminal record signals a degree of unfairness:

Well obviously they have um...ended up in circumstances whether it be in...within their control or without their control [...] I suppose...given them a black mark against their name. I mean I've got friends who've got criminal record, I mean... You know it's because of circumstance. (Toby, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

One of the most consistent findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses presented so far in this chapter is that employers expressed a significant aversion to hiring ex-offenders with multiple convictions on their criminal record. However, for some employers, understanding some of the broader contextual factors that led to multiple convictions being recorded was useful in mitigating the negative effects of what might look like a serious offending history.

Ryder recounts a personal example where the ex-offender had an historical record that was imposed upon him during a time when the criminal justice system treated some offences more harshly than they would under the present system. By comparison, Ryder perceives that the crimes committed by the ex-offender would have attracted far less serious sanctions under current criminal justice standards. For this reason, a criminal record containing multiple convictions may serve as a signal that the ex-offender has been subject to varying criminal justice responses over time. Understanding the context around these responses providing a more balanced perspective on the seriousness of the offending:

I've had a guy who was convicted of assault three times, been to jail twice, but when he explained to me the situation, and this was a long time ago, you know, you think "well, you had every right to do what you did" [...] it was back in the 1980s, things have changed, the judicial system has changed, you know the crime might be the same but how they treat people today is different to how he got treated [...] if you did that today you probably would have just got probation or a slap on the wrist or a fine. (Ryder, aged over 51, business owner, retail and services industry)

An ex-offender who has committed serious crimes is generally perceived in line with negative stereotypes about him or her. However, even if the offence is serious, a criminal record signals that there is a story that goes with it and gaining some level of insight into why the offence occurred minimises room for inaccurate presumptions about the individual. Anna emphasised the value in learning about the situation in which the crime occurred in order to avoid making gross assumptions:

I think we tend to pigeonhole people when we hear criminal activity or prison life or anything like that attached to them, but I don't necessarily think we should just presume that that's what it is [...] I probably need to dig deep and I would need to know really what actually happened [...] I mean, someone who's got a lot of traffic offences versus somebody who's committed murder, you know they could have a prison life, but they're two totally different people. Um...somebody that's been unfortunate um...and I say that in way that they could have been connected to a murder by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but not necessarily the person who carried out the crime...what...sort of what were the circumstances surrounding that? I guess it doesn't get rid of the crime, but it gives a bit more of an insight into it. (Anna, aged 41-50, human resources, construction and trade industry).

Given the nature or severity of some offences, it is reasonable that some employers, or most people for that matter, might attach classical attributions of crime because of what a serious criminal history signals about an ex-offender. Yet, even in cases where employers are usually inflexible in their beliefs that serious crimes are committed by inherently criminogenic people, exposure to details around the context in which the offending occurred can cause a shift in those beliefs. The personal experience Jason shared illustrates how contextual understanding mitigates stereotypical perceptions about offenders being inherently criminogenic. Even though this led to conclusions that contradict his own generalised beliefs about offenders, Jason ultimately considers a criminal record might also signal a bigger circumstantial story than what could be assumed at face value:

I happen to know this fella's [known associate's] circumstances and when circumstances start to come into it, he was working and continuing to claim dole⁶ because he was so far below ground level with child support and debtors chasing him for money that it was the only way that he could see to get...to put food on the table and pay his rent. And if he didn't do it, he would have been bankrupt and God knows where right now. He's now waiting for a court date and I'm of this opinion that I hate these types of people, but here's a friend of mine that's stuck in this web and I'm like well...Which one does he fit into? And I know his circumstances so I don't think...It wasn't right and he's paying money back, but at the same time, if they put him in jail he can't put the money back, he can't do this, he can't do that and he'll lose his house and he'll lose...Lose everything. [...] it's really hard when you don't know all of that...but this bloke here sort of fits in two boxes and I have trouble with that. [...] but I know that there's something else over here in the context of the circumstances, that's right. That changes my opinion and if it's enough to change my opinion, then it'll change anyone else's too...because I'm pretty opinionated and as I said, I'm pretty judgemental. In general, it makes me question, what's the other side of the story? (Jason, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Apart from the circumstantial influences, employers flagged the possibility that a criminal record signals something about historical factors relating to the ex-offenders development during childhood and adolescence that may also account for their offending. While discussing what a criminal record might signal, the possibility that offending behaviour is the product of the environment in which an ex-offender grew up was emphasised in Nicholas' response:

⁶ Unemployment benefits

[...] what was their upbringing? Haven't they been given a break in their life? You know? Um... you could be a foster kid that's grown up in really shitty surroundings and had some bad breaks and had some typical outlooks on life and you go to prison for that. (Nicholas, aged 41-50, director, retail and services industry).

Building further on the idea that the childhood home environment matters, significant peer and family relationships were also cited as being influential on offending behaviour. This perspective is supported by research around the intergenerational transmission of crime which shows compelling evidence for parents with a criminal record to also have children with a criminal record (Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Farrington, Barnes, & Lambert, 1996; Farrington et al., 2009). In other words, a criminal record signals that criminal behaviour runs in the family. Sebastian's quote echoes these theoretical propositions with the added sentiment that it would be very difficult for the individual to know any different having grown up in criminogenic environments:

[...] when we talk about generational things, like if you were involved in a whole family that's full of crime waves and been in that the whole...it's very difficult for you to ever get out of that situation [...] if you've been in that background you would understand that [...] I believe it's very much generational. I've never been a...a...prison officer or anything like that, but I would imagine you would see it and you would go 'Ok Billy, I remember your father Steve or your Uncle Joe' or whatever, you know what I mean? I just think that a lot of that (crime) comes down that line. (Sebastian, aged 41-50, director, retail and services industry)

The way employers use classical or positivist attributions to ascertain their willingness to hire an ex-offender resonates with the theoretical propositions put forth by social psychologists regarding both stereotypes and individuating information being influential in the process of forming impressions about others (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982). Employers who apply classical attributions to explain offending behaviour tend to make presumptions about who the ex-offender is because of the offence characteristics contained within his or her criminal record and what these characteristics suggest at face-value about the ex-offender (i.e. stereotypes). In contrast, the general attitude amongst employers applying positivist attributions to explain offending behaviour is favourable to understanding the context in which the offending behaviour occurred. Employers explain that having this contextual information (i.e. individuating information) facilitates a better understanding of the individual circumstances that led to offending.

Chapter Summary

This first results chapter has examined how and why an ex-offender job-applicant's criminal record influences employers' willingness to hire by addressing the four key questions governing the focus of this results chapter. The evidence presented lends support to my proposition that the willingness of employers to hire an ex-offender might be explained by a combination of stereotypes and individuating information as set out in the Impression Formation model. Aligning with previous research, the quantitative analyses show that a criminal record negatively influences employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender job applicant (Holzer et al., 2004; Snider & Reyson, 2014, Varghese, et al., 2010). Also consistent with prior research established outside of the Australian context, employers' willingness to hire varies unfavourably or favourably depending on the ex-offender's race or the employer having had a positive experience hiring an ex-offender in the past, respectively (Fahey et al., 2006; Pager, 2009). This thesis contributes further to current knowledge by establishing how different offence characteristics independently vary employers' willingness to hire depending upon the type and severity of the crime committed, the chronicity of the offending history and time lapses since sentence completion.

This was explored further via the qualitative analyses which focussed on examining what a criminal record signals to employers as it relates to their willingness to hire. These analyses suggest employers weigh up the potential risks as a central consideration to assessing an ex-offender's suitability for employment and that these risks may differ by industry type. Heavily influencing these assessments is what employers attribute to be the cause of crime and how these attributions influence employers' attitudes towards hiring ex-offenders. Employers subscribing to classical attributions of offending behaviour generally make negative stereotypical assumptions about an ex-offender job applicant's personal character. On the other hand, employers who view offending from a positivist attribution perspective take into consideration circumstances that may have contributed to the offence occurring.

Subscribing to either classical or positive attributions of crime has implications for the extent to which employers perceive an ex-offender as more or less culpable for his or her offending behaviour. Employers who interpret offence characteristics as a signal of the ex-offenders innate character tend to view ex-offenders as a homogenous group who equally pose too great a risk for employment. The challenge, then, is for ex-offenders to strategise ways to provide employers with further individuating information about the context in which their offending occurred. Doing so enables employers to establish a better idea about the extent to which the ex-offender was responsible for his or her offending, which then has the potential to shift employers' attitudes about the perceived risk an ex-offender may pose, in turn improving their willingness to hire.

This first results chapter has been focussed on developing an understanding of how and why a criminal record influences employers' willingness to hire. In Chapter Five that follows, I build on these results by examining the beliefs held by employers about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime, also in connection with their willingness to hire. The results in Chapter Five also encompass a deeper exploration about what informs employers' beliefs about whether or not someone who has once been involved in crime can change and desist from further offending.

5. BELIEF IN REDEEMABILITY IN THE WILLINGNESS TO HIRE

MODEL: An integration of the results

“...an individual’s beliefs and biases can impel and even determine decision making that can affect the nation and the world.”

Anne Spain Bradley, 2017

Introduction

The purpose of this results chapter is two-fold. First, to test whether there is an association between employers’ belief in redeemability and willingness to hire. I examine this as a first step in assessing the feasibility of my Willingness to Hire model, which I proposed in Chapter Two. The second aim is, to investigate what factors might influence a belief in redeemability since beliefs and attitudes are suggested by others to be malleable (Blair et al., 2001; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Hough & Park, 2002), and to formulate an in-depth understanding of how employers conceptualise the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime. The results in this chapter provide empirical evidence that a higher belief in redeemability improves the chances of employers being willing to hire an ex-offender. As well, I find support for the proposition that belief in redeemability can alter in association with employers’ age, previous experiences of hiring an ex-offender, and ex-offenders demonstrating their change and desistance from crime. The second question set outlined below guides my analysis in this chapter.

QUESTION SET 2: Assessing the employability of an ex-offender: Belief in redeemability

Quantitative questions

1. What is the relationship between belief in redeemability and employers’ willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record?
2. What predicts a belief in redeemability?

Qualitative questions

1. What characterises the difference between belief in redeemability scores?
 2. What do employers perceive the capacity to change depends on?
-

Through a comparison of the belief in redeemability tertile groups (low, mid and high), I established how employers’ beliefs differed on the basis of perceptions about the possibility of change versus the probability of change. The distinguishing characteristic differentiating beliefs as low, mid or high was pessimistic attitudes about the probability of change, which were predominantly found among employers with low beliefs. In the last section of this chapter, I examine what employers

perceive to be the determinants of change. I show that employers perceived the capacity for offenders to change as depending upon their innate character to do so, external influences prompting change, or a combination of both. Again, these explanations provided by employers align with classical and positivist attributions (Cullen et al., 1985).

Higher Beliefs, Greater Chances of Hiring: What is the Relationship between Belief in Redeemability and Employers' Willingness to Hire? (*Quantitative Question 1*)

As proposed in Chapter Two, belief in redeemability is one of two components featured in my Willingness to Hire model. Inspired by the process of impression formation, my proposed model replaces stereotypes with belief in redeemability as one component, along with desistance signals, that may be instrumental in the process of employers' formulating their willingness to hire an ex-offender. Studies to date have demonstrated that for employers encountering a job applicant who is an ex-offender, their hesitation to hire is primarily influenced by what offence characteristics are contained within the job applicant's criminal record (i.e. crime type, chronicity of offending, etc.) and the associated risks employers perceive might be present (Albright & Denq, 1996; Fahey et al. 2006; Lukies et al., 2011; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager & Western, 2009). Although beliefs about potential further offending or other issues may feature for employers when considering an ex-offender for employment, the flip side of this coin is that beliefs about the potential for ex-offenders to change and desist from crime may also be present and conversely influence hiring decisions. To date this possibility has not been examined.

By adopting Maruna and King's (2009) belief in redeemability four-item scale (summed to a single belief in redeemability score ranging from 1 = Low to 6 = High), I examined whether employers' beliefs about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime influences their willingness to hire. To test this, I build further on the MLR model from Chapter Four and add a fourth model to adjust for belief in redeemability – *BRGen*. The results shown in Table 5.1 provide supporting evidence that belief in redeemability significantly improves the chances that employers would be willing to hire a job applicant with a criminal record.

In Comparison One, for every one-unit increase in *BRGen*, the odds of agreeing to hire an ex-offender are almost three times greater than disagreeing to hire, (OR = 2.96, $b = 1.09$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 30.52, p < .001$). In other words, the more employers believe an offender can change and desist from crime, the higher the chances they will be willing to hire compared to being unwilling.

Table 5.1

Multinomial Logistic regression model predicting the independent effect of BRGen on employers' willingness to hire (Hire2) for employers who agree (Comparison One), or employers who neither agree nor disagree (Comparison Two), compared with employers who disagree (reference)

| COMPARISON ONE | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | | Model 4 | | |
|---|---|------------------|------------------|------|------------------|------------------|------|-------------------|------------------|------|-------------------|------------------|------|
| Willingness to hire by employers who agree ¹ | | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR |
| Race | Indigenous Australian Ref: Caucasian Australian | -0.62* (0.27) | 5.19 | 0.54 | -0.61* (0.27) | 5.04 | 0.54 | -0.69* (0.28) | 5.85 | 0.50 | -0.77** (0.30) | 6.65 | 0.46 |
| Education | Not completed SS Reference: Completed SS, TAFE, Higher Ed. | | | | 0.61 (0.42) | 2.15 | 1.84 | 0.29 (0.44) | 0.42 | 0.52 | 0.37 (0.47) | 0.62 | 1.45 |
| CrimHiredPos | Positive experience Reference: No/neutral/neg. experience | | | | | | | 1.62*** (0.39) | 17.18 | 5.04 | 1.31** (0.42) | 9.78 | 3.70 |
| BRGen | | | | | | | | | | | 1.09*** (0.20) | 30.52 | 2.96 |
| COMPARISON TWO | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | | Model 4 | | |
| Willingness to hire by employers who neither agree nor disagree ¹ | | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR |
| Race | Indigenous Australian Ref: Caucasian Australian | -0.09 (0.25) | 0.12 | 0.92 | -0.08 (0.25) | 0.10 | 0.93 | -0.08 (0.25) | 0.10 | 0.92 | -0.12 (0.25) | 0.24 | 0.88 |
| Education | Not completed SS Reference: Completed SS, TAFE, Higher Ed. | | | | 0.73† (0.38) | 3.77 | 2.08 | 0.73† (0.38) | 3.64 | 2.07 | 0.79* (0.39) | 4.13 | 2.19 |
| CrimHiredPos | Positive experience Reference: No/neutral/neg. experience | | | | | | | 0.06 (0.46) | 0.01 | 1.06 | -0.07 (0.47) | 0.03 | 0.93 |
| BRGen | | | | | | | | | | | 0.56*** (0.16) | 11.49 | 1.74 |
| -2 log likelihood | | | 21.23 | | | 33.84* | | | 56.98*** | | | 273.73*** | |
| Pearson Chi ² | | | 0.00 | | | 0.10 | | | 6.37 | | | 143.03 | |
| Deviance Chi ² | | | 0.00 | | | 0.10 | | | 8.39 | | | 147.06 | |
| Cox & Snell | | | 0.02 | | | 0.03 | | | 0.08 | | | 0.17 | |
| Nagelkerke | | | 0.02 | | | 0.03 | | | 0.09 | | | 0.20 | |

¹ Reference category is disagree. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ **Notes.** Test statistics: B = coefficient estimates; Wald χ^2 = chi-square testing null = 0; OR = exponentiated value of the coefficient, interpreted as an odds ratio. Goodness of fit test parameters: *Pearson's χ^2* and *Deviance* relies on non-significant tests to indicate the model fits the data well; -2LL relies on statistically significant tests to indicate goodness of fit; Effect size statistic: *Cox & Snell* and *Nagelkerke* Pseudo R-squared statistics indicate variance accounted for in the model. Generally report *Nagelkerke's R²* as a proportion of variance. Sample size n = 367.

In Comparison Two, *BRGen* was also associated with higher odds that employers would neither agree nor disagree they would be willing to hire ($OR = 1.74, b = 0.56, Wald\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 11.49, p < .001$) compared to those who disagreed. Pearson $\chi^2 (156, N=367) = 143.03, p = .76$ and Deviance $\chi^2 (156, N=367) = 147.06, p = 0.68$ statistics are both non-significant in this fourth model, indicating the model is a good fit. This is confirmed further by the significant -2 log likelihood statistic, $-2LL (8, N = 367) = 273.73, p = .000$, which also indicates the model is a good fit. Model Four accounts for 20 percent of the variation within the MLR model, indicated by Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.20$, which increased by 0.11 between Model Three and Model Four. This indicates *BRGen* accounts for an additional 11 percent of the variance amongst employers' reported willingness to hire an ex-offender.

Adjusting the MLR model for *BRGen* affected the influence of *Education* on *Hire2* where the odds that employers who neither agreed nor disagreed they would be willing to hire ($OR = 2.19, b = 0.79, Wald\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 4.13, p < .05$) compared to those who disagreed increased from Model Three and became significant. This means that when adjusting for redeemability beliefs, the chances for employers who did not complete secondary school compared to those with higher education to neither agree nor disagree were more than double, than those who disagreed. Also affected was the strength and significance of *Race* and *CrimHiredPos* on *Hire2* from Model Three for employers who agreed versus disagreed they would be willing to hire, which I will address in turn.

After including *BRGen* in Model Four, the effects of *Race* on employers' willingness to hire strengthened from Model Three ($OR = 0.50, b = -0.69, Wald\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 5.85, p < .05$) to Model Four ($OR = 0.46, b = -0.77, Wald\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 6.65, p < .01$). This means that when beliefs about redeemability were accounted for, the odds employers would agree rather than disagree they would be willing to hire an Indigenous Australian ex-offender compared to a Caucasian Australian ex-offender were less than before *BRGen* was included in the model. These results suggest the relationship between ex-offenders' race and employers' willingness to hire may be explained by employers' belief in redeemability. To check this assumption I ran tests for both moderation and mediation. Both tests did not return significant findings. Alternatively, this effect might be explained by widely held stereotypes about race and expectations of criminal persistence.

Earlier Australian studies concerning Indigenous populations, and U.S. studies concerning Blacks and Hispanics, consistently show that racial stereotypes influence higher expectations of criminality and stronger punitive attitudes (Brookman & Wiener, 2017; Cunneen, 2001; Quillian & Pager, 2001). The same racial stereotypes and expectations of criminality might explain why employers in this study are less likely to hire an Indigenous Australian ex-offender compared to a Caucasian Australian ex-offender. If so, my speculation with regard to the findings reported here is that an ex-offender's race may be associated with differential beliefs employers hold about whether

or not offenders can change and desist from crime. It was beyond the scope of this research to investigate this possibility, but further investigation is warranted.

After the model was adjusted for *BRGen*, the odds ratio for *CrimHiredPos* decreased from 5.04 in Model Three ($b = 1.62$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 17.18$, $p < .001$) to 3.70 in Model Four ($b = 1.31$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 9.78$, $p < .01$), but continued to be statistically significant. This means that having had a previous positive experience hiring an ex-offender had less effect on the chances employers agreed they would be willing to hire, compared to disagreeing, once *BRGen* was accounted for in the MLR model. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the large standard error is likely to be associated with the 90-10 split parameter for dummy variables only just being satisfied for *CrimHiredPos* (Rummel, 1970 cited in Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

One possible explanation for the decrease in odds is that having had a previous positive experience hiring an ex-offender refers to an encounter that has already taken place and is therefore a known quantity. Indeed, it is well known and widely reported in psychological literature that the consequences of past behaviour increase or decrease the chance the behaviour will be repeated, depending on whether the consequences were positive or negative (Albarracin & Wyer, Jr., 2000; Bentler & Speckart, 1981; Mittal, 1988; Ouellette & Wood, 1998; Skinner, 1953). However, a positive experience with ex-offenders in the past does not guarantee similar encounters with unknown ex-offenders under consideration for future employment prospects. Therefore, it stands to reason that when contemplating the prospects of hiring an ex-offender not yet known to the employer, generalised beliefs about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime will absorb some of the effect of past positive experiences on willingness to hire. The possibility cannot be ignored, however, that having had a positive experience of hiring an ex-offender in the past may contribute to employers' beliefs that offenders are able to change and desist from crime, in turn positively affecting their willingness to hire (Bower, 2008; Melton, 2009). I investigate this possibility in part response to the second quantitative question that follows, examining what predicts belief in redeemability.

Improving Redeemability Beliefs: What Predicts Belief in Redeemability? (*Quantitative Question 2*)

Based on the premise that beliefs are not fixed but are subject to malleability under the right conditions (Blair et al., 2001; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001), the importance for investigating what might improve employers' belief in redeemability of offenders is highlighted. Since higher redeemability beliefs increase the chances that employers are willing to hire an ex-offender, it is vital to gauge whether redeemability beliefs are also subject to malleability, particularly for those with lower belief in redeemability scores. To assess this, I ran a series of OLS regression analyses to test the predictive value of a range of variables on belief in redeemability. OLS was deemed to be the

most appropriate test in this case since the belief in redeemability outcome variable comprised a 6-point Likert scale measure of agreement across four scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = mildly disagree, 4 = mildly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree). Following the removal of variables that were found to have no significant effect, the final OLS analysis proceeded across five models, adding one variable at a time which included *Race*, *Age*, *CrimHiredPos*, *HardSkills*, and *SoftSkills*, displayed in Table 5.2.

The first model was not significant overall, neither was the independent variable *Race* significantly associated with belief in redeemability. With the addition of *Age* in Model Two, the model emerged as significant accounting for 2 percent of the overall variance ($F(2,364) = 3.10, p < .05$) between employers' belief in redeemability. Employers' age was found to be negatively correlated with belief in redeemability, indicating that as age increases, belief in redeemability decreases ($\beta = -0.12, p < .05$). A previous positive experience hiring an ex-offender, *CrimHiredPos*, is shown in Model Three to be positively and significantly correlated with belief in redeemability ($\beta = 0.49, p < .001$), while also decreasing the effect of *Age* ($\beta = -0.11, p < .05$). The addition of *CrimHiredPos* to Model Three accounts for a further 3 percent of the overall variance ($F(3,363) = 6.58, p < .05$) in belief in redeemability, as well as an increase in the significance of the model from $p < .05$ to $p < .001$.

Although any analysis around hard skills and soft skills as proxies for desistance signals has not been explored thus far in my thesis, I added these measures sequentially across Models Four and Five to examine whether signals of desistance influence belief in redeemability. Starting with Model Four, the results show the *HardSkills* composite measure positively and significantly influences belief in redeemability ($\beta = 0.18, p < .001$). This suggests that employers' belief in redeemability improves when an ex-offender job applicant has technical work skills that are useful for employment. The significance of *Age* is lost, and the significance of *CrimHiredPos* reduces after *HardSkills* is added to the model. The overall variance accounted for in Model Four is fifteen percent ($F(4,362) = 16.65, p < .001$), which is an increase of eleven percent from Model Three.

The fifth and final model adjusts for *SoftSkills*, a measure of the personal qualities that employers regard as indicating a good worker, such as a good attitude. *SoftSkills* positively and significantly influences belief in redeemability ($\beta = 0.19, p < .001$), and wipes out the effect and significance of *HardSkills*, yet *Age* re-emerges as significant ($\beta = -0.09, p < .05$). Adjusting the model for *SoftSkills* accounts for an additional 5 percent of the overall variance ($F(5,361) = 19.27, p < .001$) in employers' belief in redeemability. The loss of significance of *HardSkills* following the inclusion of *SoftSkills* suggests a possible mediating relationship, which is tested below⁷. Post-diagnostic tests

⁷ Tests for moderation were also conducted but no significant effects were found.

for multicollinearity are within acceptable parameters of less than ten for the VIF and no less than 0.1 for tolerance (Menard, 1995; Myers, 1990). These statistics indicate there are no issues with multicollinearity across the models (Table 5.3).

Table 5.2

Ordinary Least Squares regression testing predictors of belief in redeemability⁸

| Belief in redeemability | | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | |
|---------------------------|--|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|----------|------|----------|------|
| | | β | SE | β | SE | β | SE | β | SE | β | SE |
| Race | Indigenous Australian Ref: Caucasian Australian | -0.03 | 0.09 | -0.03 | 0.09 | -0.03 | 0.09 | -0.01 | 0.08 | -0.00 | 0.08 |
| Age | | | | -0.12* | 0.05 | -0.11* | 0.05 | -0.07 | 0.05 | -0.09* | 0.04 |
| CrimHiredPos | Positive experience Ref: No/neutral/neg. experience | | | | | 0.49*** | 0.13 | 0.37** | 0.13 | 0.34** | 0.13 |
| Desistance Signals | HardSkills SoftSkills | | | | | | | 0.18*** | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.04 |
| | SoftSkills | | | | | | | | | 0.19*** | 0.04 |
| Prob > F | | 0.09 | | 3.10* | | 6.58*** | | 16.65*** | | 19.27*** | |
| R ² | | 0.00 | | 0.02 | | 0.05 | | 0.16 | | 0.21 | |
| Adj. R ² | | -0.00 | | 0.01 | | 0.04 | | 0.15 | | 0.20 | |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 5.3

Post-diagnostic multicollinearity statistics

| Independent Variables | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | | Model 5 | |
|-----------------------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|---------|------|
| | VIF | Tol. | VIF | Tol. | VIF | Tol. | VIF | Tol. | VIF | Tol. |
| Race | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| Age | | | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.02 | 0.98 | 1.03 | 0.97 |
| CrimHiredPos | | | | | 1.00 | 1.00 | 1.02 | 0.97 | 1.03 | 0.97 |
| Hard Skills | | | | | | | 1.05 | 0.95 | 2.41 | 0.41 |
| Soft Skills | | | | | | | | | 2.37 | 0.42 |

⁸ Initial stepwise OLS models were conducted to test the independent effects of all predictor variables, which also included– *Gender, Education, IndStrata, WorkRole, EmployTotal*. Only variables with a significant effect were retained for the final analysis, with the exception of *Race*, which was retained due to the specific interest given to race in this thesis.

Using the PROCESS macro (set for mediation model 4) in SPSS I examined whether *SoftSkills* mediates the association between *HardSkills* and *BRGen*. The results of the mediation analysis confirms the relationship between *HardSkills* and *BRGen* is fully mediated by *SoftSkills* with 21 percent ($R^2 = 0.21, p < .001$) of the variance in employers' belief in redeemability explained by this mediation model. The results displayed in Table 5.4 and the corresponding model in Figure 5.1 shows a complete loss of significance between *HardSkills* and *BRGen* from the total effects, path c ($b = 0.19$; 95% CI = 0.14, 0.25, $p < .001$) to the direct effects, path c' ($b = 0.04$; 95% CI = -.04, .12, $p = 0.34$). There is also a significant indirect effect indicated by the absence of a zero in the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, between *HardSkills* and *BRGen* mediated through *Soft Skills* ($b = 0.15$; 95% CI = .07, .23).

Table 5.4

Path coefficients and indirect effects for simple mediation model (standard errors in parentheses HardSkills–BRGen, mediated by SoftSkills)

| FROM \ TO | Path Coefficients | | Indirect Effects | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Belief in redeemability (Y) | SoftSkills (M) | Estimate | Bootstrap 95% CI |
| HardSkills (X) | .04 (.04) | .83 (.04)*** | | |
| SoftSkills (M) | .18 (.04)*** | | | |
| Total | | | .19 (.02) | .14, .25*** |
| Specific: X- M -Y | | | .15 (.04) | .07, .23* |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: This mediation analysis accounted for all other MLR variables – *Race*, *Education*, *CrimHiredPos*

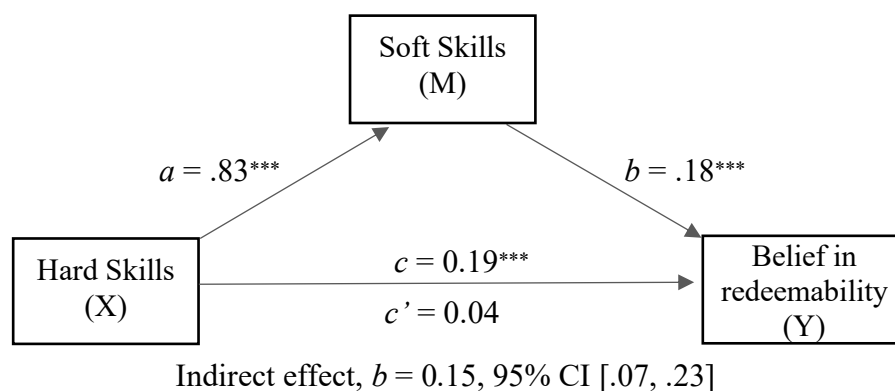


Figure 5.1 Simple mediation model of *HardSkills* as a predictor of *BRGen*, mediated by *SoftSkills*

A significant indirect effect size of 27 percent ($K^2 = .27$, 95% CI = .13, .40) suggests *SoftSkills* modestly mediates the relationship between *HardSkills* and *BRGen*. Overall, this mediation analysis means that soft skills, such as having a good attitude or being reliable, explain the relationship between hard skills and belief in redeemability. Hard skills, on the other hand, do not appear to play an influential role, but rather an instrumental role as important indicators of the soft skills an ex-offender possesses (Heckman & Kautz, 2012).

Since beliefs about the capacity for offenders to change are important for employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender, it is advantageous to also understand what informs employers' beliefs about redeemability. The following in-depth analysis of the interview data provides further insight into employers' belief in redeemability, with a particular focus on two key areas. The first of these examines what characterises the difference between employers' belief in redeemability being rated as low, mid or high. The second addresses what employers believe change and desistance from crime to be dependent upon.

Employers' Conceptualisation of Belief in Redeemability: What Characterises the Difference between Belief in Redeemability Scores? (*Qualitative Question 1*)

In Maruna and King's (2004, 2009) public opinion study, the findings show that those who subscribe to the belief that criminality is largely set in stone (i.e. low belief in redeemability) also hold strong punitive attitudes in favour of harsh penalties for offenders. Conversely, those who believe that the worst of offenders can change their ways (i.e. high belief in redeemability) are less punitive and show more favour towards community penalties. These findings suggest that where one sits on the scale of redeemability beliefs has direct implications for whether people are more or less punitive. A similar relationship has been demonstrated in this chapter of my thesis where employers scoring high on the belief in redeemability scale are more likely to be willing to hire an ex-offender, whereas those scoring low are more likely to indicate they would be unwilling. This led me to question what distinguishes the difference between employers with low redeemability beliefs through to those with high redeemability beliefs. I began this inquiry by gauging how employers perceived their own beliefs about redeemability. I asked employers in the face-to-face interviews if they believed whether someone who had been involved in crime could change and stop offending. Thirty-eight of the total forty-three participants across the belief in redeemability tertile groups (low, mid and high) affirmed their belief that someone who had engaged in offending behaviour could change and desist from crime. There are, however, distinct differences between each tertile group in how redeemability is conceptualised, and whether or not employers were pessimistic about the prospects for change and desistance from crime.

The three P's of beliefs about change – possibility, probability, and pessimism.

Through analysis of my qualitative data, the distinguishing feature that differentiated between employers with beliefs at the lower end of the redeemability scale from those at the higher end of the scale was pessimism about whether change was *possible* for someone with a history of offending. Whilst the majority of employers agreed with the possibility that offenders *could* change and desist from crime, pessimism about the *probability* offenders *would* change was mostly prevalent among employers with a low belief in redeemability, and somewhat prevalent among those with a mid-belief in redeemability. In comparison pessimistic attitudes were all but absent among employers with a high belief in redeemability.

A visual representation is provided in Figure 5.2 to help explain my analysis. Illustrated in this figure is the discrepancy between employers' objectively measured belief in redeemability scores and their own subjective self-assessed belief in redeemability. For the sake of visual comparison, the first illustration on the upper side of the continuum depicts the low, mid and high belief in redeemability tertile membership of all interview participants, established by the objective survey scale measuring belief in redeemability (A). As shown, due to the sampling strategy for the interview participants, we begin with an even distribution across the belief in redeemability continuum by tertile rankings of low ($n = 15$), mid ($n = 15$) and high ($n = 15$).

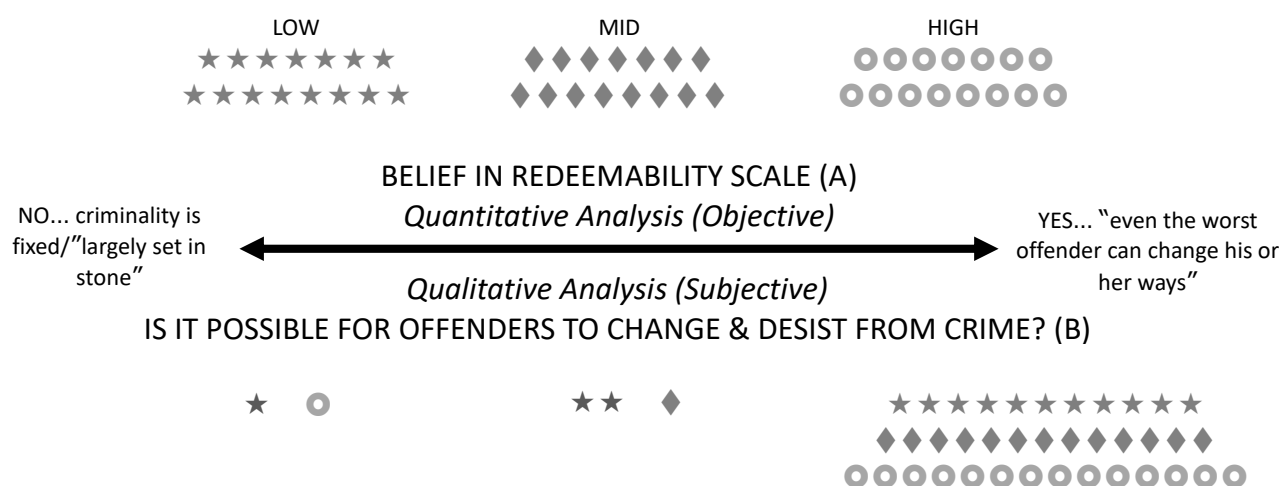


Figure 5.2 A comparison of interview participants' belief in redeemability according to the objective survey measurement (A) and participant's subjective self-assessment (B).

The second illustration on the lower side of the continuum (B) depicts interview participants' ($n = 43$)⁹ subjective self-assessment of belief in redeemability in response to the question *Do you think it is possible for someone who has been involved in crime to stop offending?* Compared to the first illustration (A), the distribution according to employers self-assessed perceptions is vastly different. A large majority state affirmatively they believe in the possibility for offenders to change and desist from crime, depicted by the heavy weighting of respondents at the “yes” end of the continuum (B).

Despite the majority of employers professing that they believe desistance from crime for offenders is possible, a number of employers expressed pessimistic attitudes about whether desistance from crime is probable. Furthermore, these pessimistic attitudes were represented by almost two-thirds of the employers in the low redeemability belief tertile ($n = 9$), and one-third in the mid-redeemability belief tertile ($n = 5$). Only one employer with high-redeemability beliefs expressed some pessimism. Maybe this pessimism is closely connected with the employers' risk assessments around hiring an ex-offender, a key point raised in Chapter Four. In the world of risk assessments and risk reduction, the possibility that an adverse event may or may not occur, like re-offending, is tempered by considerations around the probability of its occurrence. Put more simply – anything is possible; it is whether it is probable that really matters. Sunstein and Zeckhauser (2010) explain, however, that the propensity for humans is to react or respond to the possibility of an adverse event occurring as if the probability of its occurrence is high, even though it may be low.

Pessimism about whether change for offenders is probable was observed by subtle nuances in employers' responses. Small indicators such as the use of ‘but’ or ‘however’ after agreeing with the possibility an offender can change and desist from crime heightens the sense that employers' are pessimistic about whether such change is probable, implying an unstated expectation for further offending. For some employers, their pessimism tended to be explained by what is perceived as the necessary socio-structural conditions to affect change, but they voiced these conditions as unlikely options for those who have offended. For example, Anthony, who scores low in redeemability beliefs, agrees with the possibility of desistance from crime, but is pessimistic about an ex-offender's desire to change because of his or her external socio-environmental influences that may not be conducive to desistance. For Anthony, change in behaviour has to be personally driven, but he also sees offenders as entrenched in a life that is difficult to break away from, creating a barrier for offenders to affect change in their own lives:

⁹ As explained in Chapter Three, the total interviews for analysis reduced to $n = 43$ because of the two interviews from the mid-tertile range that could not be transcribed due to poor audio quality

I'm the eternal optimist, so I like to think that everybody can, but [*emphasis added*] some don't want to I guess and that's the life they know, it's a lifestyle that they've chosen, no not even chosen, they know it is a lifestyle they fell into...um...not necessarily to be a problem, but they don't know how to live any other lifestyle. (Anthony, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry).

Other employers are pessimistic about the probability for change because of a range of offence characteristics, such as the type of crime committed. This might shed further light on why offence characteristics differentially influence employers' willingness to hire, as shown in the previous results chapter. For instance, according to Audrey, who also rates low in redeemability beliefs, change for drug offenders is not probable because the offence characterises who the offender is—an addict. In the previous chapter it was shown that employers are less willing to hire an ex-offender job applicant if the conviction was for drugs instead of violence. Perhaps this is because reports of violent offending are often framed within situational contexts (ABS, 2017b) and therefore may not be associated as heavily with a person's character. Audrey's pessimism about the probability of change is grounded in her idea that the proclivity for persistent offending is motivated by the innate nature of certain offender types, which she explains with reference to their character, personality, or physiological addictions. Although she questions the influence of others, what is suggested in her response is that these causes of crime are inherently stable and so the prospects for change are unlikely:

[...] the multiple parking fine offender...multiples, they just don't give a shit and they'll just keep doing it. I think, paedophiles, they...it's who they are so I think they'll always do it...um fraud...I think they're greedy personalities, so they'll continue to do it. Drug addicts, I think they have addictive personalities and I think they will continue to do it whether it's a chosen drug or whether it's an alternate form of addiction, like drug addicts can turn into sex addicts, they'll leave that drug and go to another form of addiction. I think that unfortunately, once people have a criminal history they'll just continue on that path and whether that's influenced by the time they spend around the same cohort of people or not, I don't know, but I don't think it happens very often where you do something wrong, you go to jail, you get a criminal history and that's the end of it. (Audrey, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

In a similar vein to employers perceiving change as improbable on account of the offender's innate criminogenic nature, others with low redeemability beliefs tended to convey an offender-centric perspective, emphasising offender agency as being the sole catalyst for change and desistance from offending. From this perspective, employers' doubts about the probability of change were

enveloped in pessimism that offenders could affect their own change. This was the point of reservation for some employers with low redeemability beliefs who remain pessimistic, such as Blake, who believes people can change, but adds, “they’ve got to want to change and therein lies the big problem”. Christian reflects a similar pessimistic attitude about change being probable due to the necessity for ex-offenders to be motivated to change. Christian disregards anything else as contributing to the ex-offender’s change, unless this is preceded by his or her desire to change:

I think anybody...anything could change and they can but it’s whether they choose to or not. It’s...you know, it’s up to them, it’s not up to us to change them, they’ve got to change themselves. [...] They can have all the training you like, but if they’re not going to change their ways, it’s wasted isn’t it? It’s wasted. (Christian, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

As noted earlier, a smaller cohort of employers in the mid belief in redeemability tertile (i.e. 5/15), also expressed some pessimism about the probability of change. Employers in the mid tertile group are those whose redeemability beliefs lie between the lower and higher end of the belief in redeemability continuum (i.e ‘criminality as fixed’ versus ‘criminality is entirely changeable’). In slight contrast to employers with low redeemability beliefs, pessimistic attitudes held by employers with mid redeemability beliefs feature a combination of offender agency and circumstantial factors as being instrumental for affecting change and desistance from crime. Compared to low belief employers whose pessimism stems from a heavy reliance on offender agency alone to affect change, pessimistic attitudes amongst employers with mid redeemability beliefs tend to be grounded in whether the right conditions for change are present. For instance, Dominic agrees that it is possible for offenders to change, but sees this as being influenced by the circumstances of his or her life, as well as having the capacity to recognise his or her own transgression and be motivated to change:

I suppose it would depend on the extent of the criminal record and what...what sort of things they’ve been in trouble for I suppose. [...] I suppose it depends how long they’ve been in the...involved in the system I suppose, like whether they’ve seen the error of their ways and want to fix that up (Dominic, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

For some employers in the mid belief in redeemability group, the interconnectedness of offender agency and circumstantial factors was also seen as a barrier for the probability of change unless there is some separation between the offender and criminogenic circumstances. Without offenders taking charge to separate themselves from criminogenic situations, mid-belief employers

remain pessimistic that change is probable. Using William's example, the possibility an offender can change and desist from crime requires personal agency in the form of self-control to avoid the criminogenic situations where crime occurs. The problem, as William sees it, is that the 'type' of person who finds him or herself in a criminogenic situation lacks self-control which is why they wind up committing crime in the first place. The lack of agency is therefore the focal point of William's pessimism about whether an offender is likely to avoid criminogenic situations and in turn desist from crime:

Yes, in certain cases I...I think it is [possible to change]...but um...it's got to take a lot of will power and um...and a lot of effort on their part and I think probably that the sort of people that get caught up in that crime, generally are the sort of people that don't have a lot of will power, that's how they end up in that circumstance in the first place. (William, business owner, retail and services industry)

Contrary to the pessimistic attitudes featured in responses from employers at the low and mid-range of the redeemability scale, employers high in redeemability beliefs generally view offending behaviour as a momentary occurrence in the offender's history, rather than a permanent feature of their lives. Employers' with high redeemability beliefs subscribe to the belief that the worst offenders can change, and generally lack pessimism regarding the probability for change. High belief employers emphasise the provision of opportunities as central for orchestrating change. For instance, Jamie perceives offending behaviour as an error of ways rather than a manifestation of the individual's inability to avoid offending. In addition to agreeing that it is possible for an offender to change, Jamie further elaborates how the probability of desistance is driven by the opportunity for personal improvement because of past involvement in offending behaviour:

I believe that everybody makes mistakes in life, you know, and everybody learns from that mistake and everybody has the opportunity to progress and move forward, and...it's not easy for them, sure, it's not easy for anyone to progress and move forward after they've done something they really regretted, but they can be a better person because of it or they can actually just become a better person in general. (Jamie, High BR, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Quite distinct from employers with low or mid redeemability beliefs, employers with high beliefs, are rather explicit in their views of offending behaviour being enacted by someone mistakenly at some point in his or her life, as opposed to being an innate part of whom he or she is and what his or her lifestyle entails. Consequently, it is not a matter of change and desistance from crime being

dependent on offender agency, but opportunities that encourage change. In Anna's response below, she is not idealistic to think that being granted an opportunity is the panacea for offending. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the role others have in the probability of change and is accordingly more optimistic about the prospects for change, since change does not rely solely on the offender:

I always like to look at people as you know, they may have made a mistake in their life, but they have an opportunity to correct that, and as time moves on I think there are people who have moved from being not such a great citizen in the community to being a valuable citizen in a community and they get given that opportunity. [...] with another opportunity they can prove that they are a worthy person, it obviously doesn't apply to everybody, but there are people that that does apply to. (Anna, High BR, human resources, construction and trade industry)

Despite the fact that employers differed in their view about whether change was possible because of the apparent pessimism for some about the probability of change, employers from across each tertile grouping held more consistent beliefs about redemption. These beliefs were framed with reference to the deservingness of second chances and that an opportunity for offenders to redeem themselves should be given. It is through the opportunity of a second chance that offenders are able to demonstrate their redeemability, which is clearly articulated by Toby who stated, "I think sometimes people just have to have a little bit of faith in those people [offenders] and give them an opportunity to display that they have changed". What became evident when examining these narratives in support of second chances was an interesting contrast between employers with high and low redeemability beliefs in terms of how second chance opportunities should be offered. Employers rating higher in redeemability beliefs, like Madison, supported second chances being provided without reservation:

I mean it doesn't worry me too much, everyone deserves a second chance. You know, I mean even a third and fourth chance [...] especially if they haven't had those chances with you, you know, before, then I still think they deserve a go. [...] you've got to keep giving people chances, you know we all make mistakes. [...] I think positive reinforcement and encouragement can do a lot for somebody, especially if they can't do something or nobody has given them a go, you know? (Madison, manager, retail and services industry)

On the other hand, employers rating low, were more inclined to attach conditions to the provision of second chances. From a moral standpoint, there was no question that employers with

low redeemability beliefs were on board with the notion that opportunities for redemption should be provided to offenders. However, among these employers second chances were limited by the conditions that would be placed on offenders who were provided with those chances. For example, Sebastian expects that in giving an offender a second chance they would remain faultless. He says “I’d be the bloke that would say ‘alright mate, thumbs up, come and have a go but don’t cock up again, you know? Don’t do that again’”. The conditions for Nicholas were similar, but also contingent upon what offence was committed:

I’m quite open to...you know, I believe everyone deserves second chances. [...] If I was allowed to know what it [the offence] was well, then we’d have half a chance at giving someone a break. [...] I think everyone deserves a second chance, but it’s harder as they go third and fourth or fifth offence. (Nicholas, director, retail and services industry)

Employers’ belief in redeemability may be contingent upon other factors given the uncertainty some employers expressed about whether or not offenders are redeemable. Since desistance is espoused by employers to be possible, but not necessarily probable, this led me to question what employers perceived change and desistance from crime to be dependent upon. Here, employers again framed their understanding for change in offending behaviour in terms of attributional explanations. These are examined in response to the final question being addressed in this chapter.

Determinants of Change: What Does the Capacity to Change Depend on? (*Qualitative Question 2*)

The aim of this question is to elicit an in-depth analysis about what employers perceive to be the necessary factors for change and desistance from crime to take place. Similar to employers’ understanding of offending behaviour presented in Chapter Four, conditions for change described by employers resonate with classical and positivist attributions of crime, where crime occurs because of who the offender is, or because of their social circumstances, respectively (Cullen et al., 1985). Applying attributional explanations to desistance from crime, employers suggest that change occurs because of the individual offender’s internal drive to change as an outworking of who they are (classical), because of outside influences that encourage the offender’s desistance (positivist), or the offender’s personal motivation to engage with opportunities that promote desistance (combination).

Of particular note, clear differences between employers’ responses emerge according to belief in redeemability tertile groupings. Those with high or mid redeemability beliefs readily identify a range of factors perceived as necessary for offenders to change and desist from crime described in terms of classical or positivist attributions, or a combination. On the other hand, employers with low redeemability beliefs, almost exclusively adopt a classical attribution position and place the bulk of

the responsibility on offenders' to effect their own change. If employers with low redeemability beliefs perceive both offending behaviour and the possibility for change to be contingent upon offenders' inherent nature to behave in one way or the other, then it may not seem reasonable to this group of employers that desistance from crime would be produced out of the same internal influence as offending behaviour. This might further explain why employers with low redeemability beliefs are pessimistic about the probability for offenders to change.

The capacity to change depends on who you are.

Under classical attributions of change, the possibility for change is generally described by employers in terms of the individual ex-offender "wanting to change". Employers perceive this desire to change as transpiring from within the individual, as a manifestation of 'who' they are, as opposed to 'what' they do. Both ex-offenders (Maruna, 2001) and employers are consistent in their views that desistance from crime depends on the individual offender's internal motivation to change, as per classical attribution explanations (Cullen, et al., 1985). In his book *Making Good*, Maruna (2001) recounts narratives of desisting offenders who took part in the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS), a study which sought to understand the subjective experience of criminal persistence in contrast with desistance from crime through the lived experience of 'persisters' and 'desisters'. What was emphasised by desisters throughout these narratives was the centrality of agency in their desistance from crime. Contrasting the narratives of desisters and persisters, Maruna (2001:88) highlights three distinct agentic features contained within the narratives of desisters as part of what he conceptualises as 'the redemption script'. First, desisters fundamentally believe their true character is that of a desister. Second, desisters sense they possess the ability to govern the purpose of their own lives. Third, desisters express altruistic desires to contribute to society and future generations.

Similar to the way desisters described their move away from offending behaviour in Maruna's (2001) study, some employers also perceived desistance to be motivated by a desister's true character. In this regard, employers described how desistance from crime is achieved by the ex-offender making the rational conscious choice to act upon what they inherently believe. William, who is in the mid belief tertile, emphasises self-belief as being instrumental for change, and personal effort to construct a new self. William distinguishes between intentions and genuine motivation to change:

[...] it's got to take a lot of will power [to change] and um...and a lot of effort on their (offenders') part...Um...it's a bit like stopping smoking or stopping drinking...all that...It's all well to say 'I want to stop smoking or I want to stop drinking', but they've got to firmly believe in their head that they do [*emphasis added*] want to." (William, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

The second feature of Maruna's (2001) redemption script – the ability to govern the purpose of one's own life – features for some employers in terms of the degree of self-control an offender exercises over the choices he or she makes that are conducive to change. For Jason, who rates low in redeemability beliefs, this is encapsulated in his viewpoint that change is entirely the offender's responsibility, rather than this being part of the transition to desistance. Here, Jason describes change requiring an offender to exercise self-control over his or her own life. Jason extends the idea of desistance being dependent upon the offender's desire to change, to also having the tenacity to take control and bring about change:

[...] not everybody can [change] because it comes down to the individual person...what they've got in here [*gestures towards stomach*], what they've got in here [*gestures towards heart*] and what they've got in here [*gestures towards head*]. They might want to [change] but they just don't have the strength to do it. They're the only [*emphasis added*] person that's got control over their own self. (Jason, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Along the same lines of self-control and drawing on classical attributions, Mitchell acknowledges that some people lack the capacity to make choices that are conducive to non-offending behaviour. Mitchell, in the mid belief in redeemability tertile, implies that a sense of autonomy in exercising self-control is paramount by way of having the intellectual or physical capacity to choose non-offending behaviour over offending behaviour. He further argues that if this capacity to choose one or the other is diminished, then the offender's autonomy to choose should be removed altogether:

It really boils down to the person. If they have done something they need to decide whether they are going to do it again or not...it is a choice...um...and If you say "oh, they couldn't help themselves" well then they need to be institutionalized. I know that's coming across very harsh, but if they are not physically, mentally capable of making the right choice, then you've got to ask yourself some serious questions whether they should be allowed to continue making those poor choices for someone else to deal with and clean up the wreckage after. I think that's wrong. (Mitchell, director, retail and services industry)

The desire to give back to society, noted as the third aspect in the redemption script is highlighted by Jamie's personal example. Jamie recounts a story of a member of the volunteer organisation he is a part of who has "a couple of convictions, but then progressed and moved on". This particular member (ex-offender) was granted the opportunity to take on a position of trust within

the volunteer organisation. In Jamie's first-hand account of witnessing the bestowal of trust within a broader community group context, he claims the opportunity for this individual to perform their 'real self' – a trustworthy person – through giving back to the community was the primary dependent for their desistance from crime:

[He was] put in a situation where he had to be trusted one hundred percent with all the dollars and cents and everything like that and because he knew and everyone else knew that he was in charge of it...he even said it later...as times progressed that was the first thing that helped him because of people trusting him again, giving him the trust. So I have seen it first-hand. (Jamie, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

The capacity to change depends on where you are or who you are with.

In line with positivist attributions, employers acknowledged the social situations in which ex-offenders might be positioned that provide an external influence as important for desistance from crime. It is encouraging that employers recognise the role of external influences in desistance from crime since criminological research has consistently shown there are indeed a range of socio-structural factors that precipitate desistance. I outlined these factors in Chapter Two, such as marriage, parenthood, or having a job. These factors are explained by social control theorists (Caspi & Moffitt, 1993; Hirschi, 2002; Kirk, 2012; Laub et al., 1998), life course theorists (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998), and desistance theorists (Farrall, 2002; Maruna, 2001) as providing ex-offenders with a reason to avoid further offending, such as having too much to lose or wanting to uphold their responsibilities and live in accordance with their new identity.

Comparably, and in line with positivist attributions, employers perceive a range of external socio-structural influences as being an integral part of an offender's capacity to change. Between scholarly reports and employers' perspectives, the common theme underpinning positivist attributions of change is that external influences tend to provide offenders with either a sense of responsibility or source of accountability to desist from crime. Applying a positivist attribution reasoning as a determinant for change was more prevalent amongst employers from both high and mid belief in redeamability tertiles, with minimal representation of these views among employers with low beliefs.

First, being in a prison environment was seen by some employers to position offenders to engage with opportunities for rehabilitation or education that may not be available or accessible otherwise. These opportunities were seen to provide offenders with a source of accountability to work towards the changes needed to avoid further offending. In support of this view, a study by Applegate and colleagues (1997) reports how the general public consider prison as a means for offenders to

change their behaviour or rehabilitate, with more than 80 percent rating rehabilitation as an important goal for prison. From a positivist attribution point of view, Applegate et al's. (1997) study suggests the general public consider the prison environment an external influence of change for prisoners. The employers in my study also endorse the beneficial aspect of incarceration as providing a social environment in which offenders have access to education and rehabilitation that would otherwise be unavailable. Being contained within the prison environment not only provides a turning point for offenders to work towards change and desistance from crime, but also the time needed to effect such change. From among the high redeemability belief tertile of employers, Flynn suggests that the capacity to change depends on displacing an offender from his or her usual environment into an environment that is geared towards fostering change:

From what I've heard, the jails can be a bloody good thing for some of those people, they learn some good stuff inside, you know...they're actually put somewhere where they can...you know...they can turn around. They couldn't do it out here, they couldn't do it outside of the system really. You take a guy, he's done something stupid, you put him away for three or four years, he's got three or four years to think about it, but he's got three or four years of access to books, to programs that are geared specifically for him and for people like him or her...so...yeah in that regard I think jails are a good thing. (Flynn, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Employers also recognised that social networks between the offender and influential others are an integral part of the social environment. These personal networks are embedded in the broader social environment that either influence continued offending behaviour or provide a sense of accountability to desist. Dylan, who rates high in redeemability beliefs, explained this with his example of how change depends on the offender moving away from a social environment embedded with negative peer influences. He emphasised that the culture of the community environment and social networks that exist within it either promote continued offending or desistance from it. Disconnecting from a negative peer network by relocating, is how Dylan perceived change can be brought about:

[...] their lifestyle, who they knock around with, you know? Where they are. I think if you put a bloke that did crime in say...and I'm just, not pin pointing anywhere, but say, [low SES suburb omitted]¹⁰ in Brisbane, if you put him back into [low SES suburb

¹⁰ For added context, the suburb omitted from Dylan's response is well known as being characterised by neighbourhood disadvantage

omitted], probably going to do the same thing again. But if you shift him out of there and put him in Toowoomba, with a job and everything, he may change completely. Like he might say well “it’s a fresh start, I can give this” And then all of a sudden things are happening for him where it wasn’t happening for him down there, cos he was with the wrong crowd...and it is habit, like, you know it’s...it’s the environment I suppose. I think if you put them in a different environment, with different people who they become friends with, I think they will change. I suppose that’s basically it at the end of it, isn’t it? (Dylan, High BR, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

A slightly different type of external influence perceived by employers to affect change and desistance from crime is having to take care of responsibilities. Responsibilities take various forms where some are towards the care of significant others, while others are concerned with maintaining obligations such as paying bills. Employers describe these types of responsibilities as being the catalyst for change for some offenders on account of others relying upon them to do the right thing. Since continued offending would potentially jeopardise the maintenance and retention of relationships and acquisitions the offender is responsible for, these types of responsibilities then encourage change. For instance, Andrew, who is low in redeemability beliefs, described how family and financial responsibilities prompt a change in how people conduct themselves, assuming it would have the same effect for prompting desistance from crime:

Quite often if they’ve come out, you know, and they’ve had children and they’re that bit older and that sort of thing, that gives them a bit of responsibility and that can quite often help a lot. Like, nearly all my guys have got loans and different sorts of things and you can see the change in them once they got children and they get loans and that, and quite often that makes the penny drop [...] it means they’ve grown up a little bit. (Andrew, aged 31-40, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Brodie, another employer in the mid redeemability belief tertile, captured the same ideas in his response about responsibilities being the catalyst for change. In his response though, he explained that having responsibilities lessens the extent to which someone will engage in risky behaviours. For this reason, he attributes these types of external influences as creating a sense of stability and therefore being important for change:

Once you get to your...a bit older, your thirties, and you have children, you take less risks with that and I think it’s the same with criminal offending. People will take less risks [...] with home ownership...home ownership is a really good thing for people, they tend to

take less risks, hold down jobs and get up to less mischief when they're in their own houses. When you're just renting you can just move on. (Brodie, aged 31-40, business owner, construction and trade industry)

On the flip side, the loss of significant others or personal acquisitions was seen to create external social pressures to bring some offenders to the breaking point that compels change. In this regard, change is not dependent upon maintaining responsibilities, but is compelled by the consequences of having lost relationships of value that may have formed part of the offender's responsibilities. For Harrison, who has high redeemability beliefs, he anticipated the experience of loss and hardship within the offender's own social spheres would lead them towards change:

[...] the majority of them need to have that catalyst, do you know what I mean of hitting rock bottom or losing friends, losing family, losing their own life by being locked up in jail for extended periods of time [...]? (Harrison, aged 51-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

The capacity to change depends on who you are and where you are.

Up to this point, the findings presented with respect to what employers perceive change to be dependent upon have focussed on the capacity to change and desist from crime being associated with either the innate character of the individual (classical attributions) or the social situations in which they are embedded (positivist attributions). Whilst both concepts feature within employers' narratives and align with the theoretical propositions around attributional explanations, employers also viewed change to depend on a combination of both classical and positivist attributions. In other words, it is not sufficient for ex-offenders to rely entirely on their own capacity to change; they must also be given the right opportunities that foster change. In the same vein, relying solely on opportunities that foster change is inadequate without the personal motivation to embrace such opportunities.

Employers viewed external influences as important by way of offenders being positioned in situations and in proximity to others favourable to desistance. However, the effectiveness of external influences were considered to be conditional on offenders actively engaging in or responding to opportunities, ultimately driving their own change. Again, there was a concentration of employers from the mid and high redeemability tertiles who viewed a combination of attributions to be necessary for an offender to change. This suggests that among those with higher beliefs about change, there is a clearer understanding about the conditions, both internal and external to the offender, that brings about change. One example, from the mid redeemability beliefs tertile, is provided by Alica, who describes how a sequence of classical then positivist attributions are needed for change, where change originates from within before external influences have any effect. She argues that rehabilitation is not

an antidote to offending, in the prescriptive sense that it can be provided or applied to a person to prompt change. Instead it relies on the offender's self-identification as a desister as well as his or her willingness to actively engage with the rehabilitative process to reap the personal benefits of change:

People will only change if they want to change, so there...it doesn't matter how much rehabilitation, and how much counselling and how much help you can give somebody... if they don't want...if they think that that life is what they've learnt and that's all that's expected of them and that's all they expect of themselves, then they're not going to change. But somebody who goes to the rehab and goes to the counselling and thinks that they are better than that will change. [...] I think there are definitely people who are caught in that social network and once you're in that sort of social network it's very difficult to get out of it, but, they need to want to. It's...it's like any... it's like an addiction isn't it? It becomes...that's all they know. (Alica, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Some employers apportioned a level of responsibility on offenders to be actively involved in their own process of change via help-seeking behaviours and capitalising on available opportunities. Although the provision of opportunities potentially steers offenders towards genuine change, these opportunities are only effective if offenders themselves are driven to seek them out. Jonathon, who rates high in redeemability beliefs, emphasised that external sources of influence alone are ineffective for change without offenders being actively engaged in their own change:

[...] you know someone just going to jail doesn't necessarily change them unless they want to change, it's like anybody, for someone who is massively obese he can have all the operations in the world, but if he doesn't genuinely want to lose weight, then it's never going to happen. With any, I wouldn't say mental thing, but anything in your mind, it doesn't change until you want to change. (Jonathon, aged 18-30, business owner, construction and trade industry)

An alternative perspective is that the conditions deemed necessary for change can originate from sources external to the offender, compared to the preceding examples describing the primacy of the offender's internal drive. In this instance, it is the external influence that encourages the offender's drive towards change. This is illustrated by Lola, in the mid belief in redeemability tertile, who adopts the view that change fundamentally depends on the offender. However, she described how the initial push towards change can originate external to the offender. Lola suggested that external influences or opportunities can adjust the internal position of the offender and in turn affect change:

I think it [change] is possible, absolutely possible. And sometimes it's even possible when there's been a long history of it [offending]. It depends on whether their frame of mind changes, or whether somebody actually does put some trust in them, because maybe these people have never had anybody put any trust in them or ever believed in them, so if somebody finally does believe in them, it can change their whole outlook on life. [...] depends on somebody giving them a go sometimes. It depends on the character of the person, but if somebody has been a repeat offender and then suddenly somebody is willing to believe in them and give them a go then that can change their whole outlook on life and maybe make them want to improve themselves. (Lola, Mid BR, aged 41-50, human resources, retail and services industry)

Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to test whether belief in redeemability, as a key component in my proposed Willingness to Hire model, is instrumental for employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender. My results affirm that belief in redeemability positively and significantly improved the chances that employers were willing to hire an ex-offender, providing preliminary support for belief in redeemability bearing some influence as the first component in my Willingness to Hire model. Since redeemability beliefs matter, I was also able to establish that employers' belief in redeemability is subject to change where employers have encountered a positive experience hiring an ex-offender in the past, and also when ex-offenders indicate to employers their desistance from crime. This is an important finding regarding the prospect that beliefs about redeemability are malleable, as suggested by social psychologists (Blair et al., 2001; Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Hough & Park, 2002), particularly as it relates to improving beliefs for employers rating lower on the scale of redeemability beliefs.

This being the case, I questioned why employers differed in their beliefs about redeemability and what were some of the conditions they perceived as being the catalyst for offenders to change and desist from crime. Perceptions about the possibility versus the probability for an offender to change was found to be the defining characteristic that differentiated lower redeemability beliefs from higher redeemability beliefs. Although there was agreement amongst employers that an offender *could* change and desist from crime, pessimistic attitudes about whether an offender *would* change was most prominent amongst employers scoring low on the redeemability scale, compared to those with mid or high redeemability beliefs. Since the capacity for ex-offenders to change was viewed in terms of probabilities, I extended my examination to ascertain what employers perceived change to be dependent upon. Employers applied causal explanations of classical and positive attributions as being dependents of change, where, respectively, ex-offenders' change depends on their personal

motivation to change or the influence of socio-structural environments in which they are embedded, as well as a combination of the two.

The implications of these findings point to the potential for deliberate strategies to either amplify employers' beliefs that are already higher on the belief in redeemability scale, or attenuate employers' beliefs that rate lower on the scale. Taking steps to reinforce or increase belief in redeemability may encourage an improved willingness for employers to hire. If beliefs about the redeemability of ex-offenders are governed by perceptions of possibilities and probabilities for change, and dependent upon factors that are both internal and external to the ex-offender, the next step in extending our knowledge is to understand how change is recognised. The final, following results chapter attends to this, and is dedicated to the desistance signalling component of this thesis. Within the next chapter, the overall results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses provide insight into the utility of desistance signalling for ex-offender employment, and how effective signalling assists employers to recognise desistance.

6. RECOGNISING SIGNALS OF DESISTANCE: An integration of the results

“Remember signals are supposed to make visible some invisible quality.”

Professor Shadd Maruna, 2012

Criminologist, Queens University Belfast

Introduction

Whether and how desistance signals are important for employment outcomes for ex-offenders is the focus of this third and final results chapter. At the outset of this chapter, I quantify the effects of ex-offenders’ hard skills and soft skills—the proxy measures for desistance signals in this thesis—on employers’ willingness to hire an ex-offender job applicant. Included in these quantitative analyses are a series of simple mediation and serial multiple mediation models (Hayes, 2013). These analyses enabled me to examine and substantiate the feasibility of my Willingness to Hire model in terms of whether and how desistance signals, together with belief in redeemability, influence employers’ willingness to hire. Accordingly, the relationship between belief in redeemability and the willingness of employers to hire an ex-offender is partially explained by desistance signals. Alternatively, I also find support for the relationship between desistance signals and willingness to hire being mediated by belief in redeemability.

To examine in greater depth the effectiveness of desistance signals for employers’ hiring decisions about ex-offenders, I apply my adapted desistance signalling timeline outlined previously in Chapter Two to contextualise the qualitative findings presented in this chapter. I argue that the desistance signalling timeline provides a framework by which ex-offenders may be able to strategically design how to signal their desistance from crime in practical ways to employers. Contained within the desistance signalling timeline is the desistance signalling environment, which sets out the explicit process of communicating signals, governed by a range of criteria by which the quality of the signalling environment is assessed (Connelly et al., 2011). Meeting these criteria improves the efficacy of communicating desistance signals. Through my qualitative analysis I explore whether and how these concepts are applicable to the practical ways that an ex-offender’s desistance from crime can be effectively communicated to employers.

Consistent with my previous results chapters, I integrate the results from both the qualitative and quantitative data analyses. The findings from both survey and interview data analyses presented in this chapter demonstrate that desistance signals are integral to employers’ willingness to hire an ex-offender. Guiding the focus of this chapter are the remaining research questions outlined in set three of the question matrix, repeated below. The organisation of this chapter remains consistent with the previous two results chapters where survey results are presented first in response to the

quantitative questions. Following, the results from the interview data analyses are detailed in response to the qualitative questions as a way of providing a further in-depth exploration of the preceding survey results.

QUESTION SET 3: Recognising signals of desistance

Quantitative questions

1. Do signals of desistance influence an employer's willingness to hire?
2. Do signals of desistance influence the association between belief in redeemability and willingness to hire?
3. Does belief in redeemability influence the association between desistance signals and willingness to hire?

Qualitative questions

1. What kind of desistance signals are valuable to employers in their hiring assessments of job applicants with a criminal record?
 2. How do employers recognise desistance signals?
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Effects of Desistance Signalling on Willingness to Hire: Do Signals of Desistance Influence an Employer's Willingness to Hire? (*Quantitative Question 1*)

Whether signals of desistance are instrumental in employment outcomes for ex-offenders has primarily appeared in literature as a theoretical proposition (Bushway & Apel, 2012) and has not yet been empirically tested. Part of this thesis examines whether desistance signalling is associated with employers' hiring decisions. To test the predictive value of desistance signals on employers' willingness to hire, I sequentially add the two composite variables - *HardSkills* and *SoftSkills* – as proxies for desistance signals (Bushway & Apel, 2012; Fahey et al., 2006; Visser et al., 2008) to Models Five and Six in the MLR model (see Table 6.1), respectively, adjusting for *Race*, *Education*, *CrimHiredPos* and *BRGen* from previous models. To recap, *HardSkills* is a composite variable consisting of seven factors measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Less likely to hire; 4 = Willingness unchanged; 7 = More likely to hire). Each factor assesses whether and how identifiable technical skills and formal qualifications, such as a trade certificate, would alter employers' willingness to hire from his or her initial position after the applicant's criminal record is disclosed (*Hire2*). *SoftSkills*, also a composite variable comprising six factors, assesses whether employers' willingness to hire would depend less on the ex-offender's criminal record and more on inherent qualities that are not as tangible, such as the ability to interact with others and having a good attitude, also measured on a 7-point scale (1 = Strongly disagree; 4 = Unsure; 7 = Strongly agree).

Building further on the first four models in the previous two results chapters, Model Five of the MLR shows that relative to employers who disagree (reference category) with being willing to hire, a one-unit increase in *HardSkills* is associated with significantly higher chances that employers agreed (Comparison One) they would be willing to hire (OR = 1.85, $b = 0.62$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 22.13$, $p < .001$), or neither agreed nor disagreed (Comparison Two) to hire (OR = 1.56, $b = 0.45$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 19.64$, $p < .001$). In this instance, where evidence is made available about the ex-offender job applicant's hard skills, the odds of agreeing to hire are almost two times greater than disagreeing to hire. Similarly, the odds of employers neither agreeing nor disagreeing are just over one and a half times greater than disagreeing. *BRGen* is partially mediated by *HardSkills* for both comparison groups where the strength of *BRGen* is reduced from the previous analysis (Model Four) for employers who agreed (Comparison One), and the strength and significance reduced for those who neither agreed nor disagreed (Comparison Two). This mediated effect indicates general beliefs about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime have less influence on hiring outcomes when an ex-offender's hard skills are made known. Consistent with previous results, *Race* remained a significant predictor, with a further increase in strength. As shown in Comparison One, employers who agreed rather than disagreed they would be willing to hire an Indigenous Australian ex-offender compared to a Caucasian Australian ex-offender reduced further (OR = 0.41, $b = -0.89$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 7.91$, $p < .01$). *Education* gains significance with the addition of *HardSkills*, where those who have not completed secondary education are more than two times more likely to neither agree nor disagree (OR = 2.31, $b = 0.84$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 4.03$, $p < .05$) compared to disagree than those who have completed secondary education or higher.

SoftSkills are added to Model Six, shown in Table 6.1. In Comparison One, the findings indicate that net of other variables *SoftSkills* significantly predicted higher odds that employers would agree to hire an ex-offender (OR = 2.07, $b = 0.73$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 18.65$, $p < .001$) or neither agree nor disagree, as shown in Comparison Two, (OR = 1.43, $b = 0.38$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 8.50$, $p < .01$) compared to those who would disagree. In this regard, when the soft skills employers regard as valuable were accounted for, employers were more than twice as likely to be agreeable to hire than disagreeable to hire a job applicant with a criminal record. The odds an employer neither agreed nor disagreed was almost one and a half times more compared to those who disagreed. With the addition of *SoftSkills*, *Race* increased in strength again for employers who agreed to hire (OR = 0.37, $b = -0.99$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 9.23$, $p < .01$), and *Education* lost significance again for employers who neither agreed nor disagreed to hire (OR = 2.13, $b = 0.76$, $\text{Wald}\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 3.16$, $p = .08$).

Table 6.1

Multinomial Logistic model testing the independent effect of desistance signals measured as HardSkills (Model 5) and SoftSkills (Model 6) on employers' willingness to hire (Hire2), for employers who agree (Comparison One), or employers who neither agree nor disagree (Comparison Two), compared with employers who disagree (reference)

| COMPARISON ONE | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | | Model 4 | | | Model 5 | | | Model 6 | | |
|---|---|------------------|------------------|-------|------------------|------------------|--------|-------------------|------------------|----------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|
| Willingness to hire by employers who agree ¹ | | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR |
| Race | Indigenous Australian Ref: Caucasian Australian | -0.62* (0.27) | 5.19 | 0.54 | -0.61* (0.27) | 5.04 | 0.54 | -0.69* (0.28) | 5.85 | 0.50 | -0.77** (0.30) | 6.65 | 0.46 | -0.89** (0.32) | 7.91 | 0.41 | -0.99** (0.33) | 9.23 | 0.37 |
| Education | Not completed SS Reference: Completed SS, TAFE, Higher Ed. | | | | 0.61 (0.42) | 2.15 | 1.84 | 0.29 (0.44) | 0.42 | 0.52 | 0.37 (0.47) | 0.62 | 1.45 | 0.66 (0.50) | 1.78 | 1.94 | 0.55 (0.51) | 1.16 | 1.74 |
| CrimHiredPos | Positive experience Reference: No/neutral/neg. experience | | | | | | | 1.62*** (0.39) | 17.18 | 5.04 | 1.31** (0.42) | 9.78 | 3.70 | 1.04* (0.45) | 5.31 | 2.81 | 1.08* (0.47) | 5.30 | 2.93 |
| BRGen | | | | | | | | | | | 1.09*** (0.20) | 30.52 | 2.96 | 0.87*** (0.21) | 16.56 | 2.38 | 0.65*** (0.22) | 8.34 | 1.91 |
| HardSkills | Desistance signal proxy | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0.62*** (0.13) | 22.13 | 1.85 | 0.18 (0.16) | 1.34 | 1.20 |
| SoftSkills | Desistance signal proxy | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0.73*** (0.17) | 18.65 | 2.07 |
| COMPARISON TWO | | Model 1 | | | Model 2 | | | Model 3 | | | Model 4 | | | Model 5 | | | Model 6 | | |
| Willingness to hire by employers who neither agree nor disagree ¹ | | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR | b (se) | Wald χ^2 | OR |
| Race | Indigenous Australian Ref: Caucasian Australian | -0.09 (0.25) | 0.12 | 0.92 | -0.08 (0.25) | 0.10 | 0.93 | -0.08 (0.25) | 0.10 | 0.92 | -0.12 (0.25) | 0.24 | 0.88 | -0.21 (0.26) | 0.63 | 0.81 | -0.25 (0.27) | 0.89 | 0.78 |
| Education | Not completed SS Reference: Completed SS, TAFE, Higher Ed. | | | | 0.73† (0.38) | 3.77 | 2.08 | 0.73† (0.38) | 3.64 | 2.07 | 0.79† (0.39) | 4.13 | 2.19 | 0.84* (0.42) | 4.03 | 2.31 | 0.76† (0.43) | 3.16 | 2.13 |
| CrimHiredPos | Positive experience Reference: No/neutral/neg. experience | | | | | | | 0.06 (0.46) | 0.01 | 1.06 | -0.07 (0.47) | 0.03 | 0.93 | -0.18 (0.49) | 0.13 | 0.84 | -0.15 (0.49) | 0.09 | 0.86 |
| BRGen | | | | | | | | | | | 0.56*** (0.16) | 11.48 | 1.74 | 0.38* (0.18) | 4.63 | 1.46 | 0.25 (0.19) | 1.76 | 1.28 |
| HardSkills | Desistance signal proxy | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0.45*** (0.10) | 19.64 | 1.56 | 0.18 (0.14) | 1.72 | 1.20 |
| SoftSkills | Desistance signal proxy | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 0.38** (0.13) | 8.50 | 1.46 |
| -2 log likelihood | | | | 21.23 | | | 33.84* | | | 56.98*** | | | 273.73*** | | | 441.06*** | | | 514.28*** |
| Pearson Chi ² | | | | 0.00 | | | 0.10 | | | 6.37 | | | 143.03 | | | 345.98 | | | 551.95* |
| Deviance Chi ² | | | | 0.00 | | | 0.10 | | | 8.39 | | | 147.06 | | | 328.14 | | | 435.39 |
| Cox & Snell | | | | 0.02 | | | 0.03 | | | 0.08 | | | 0.17 | | | 0.25 | | | 0.30 |
| Nagelkerke | | | | 0.02 | | | 0.03 | | | 0.09 | | | 0.20 | | | 0.29 | | | 0.34 |

¹ Reference category is disagree. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ **Notes.** Test statistics: B = coefficient estimates; Wald χ^2 = chi-square testing null = 0; B(Exp) = exponentiated value of the coefficient, interpreted as an odds ratio. Goodness of fit test parameters: Pearson's χ^2 and Deviance relies on non-significant tests to indicate the model fits the data well; -2LL relies on statistically significant tests to indicate goodness of fit; Effect size statistic: Cox & Snell and Nagelkerke Pseudo R-squared statistics indicate variance accounted for in the model. Generally report Nagelkerke's R^2 as a proportion of variance. Sample size $n = 367$.

The addition of *SoftSkills* to Model Six caused a complete loss of the significant effect of *Hard Skills* on *Hire2* for both comparison groups. As well, the significance and strength of *BRGen* for employers who agreed to hire was reduced, while for employers who neither agreed nor disagreed, the significance of this relationship was lost. Changes to the strength and/or significance of an independent variable when controlling for an additional variable indicates a possible mediated relationship, warranting further investigation. Based on the MLR results in Models Five and Six, I examined the mediating influence of *SoftSkills* on the association between *HardSkills* and *Hire2*, as well as *SoftSkills* and *HardSkills* on the association between *BRGen* and *Hire2*. Using the PROCESS macro in SPSS (Hayes, 2012), I conducted a series of mediation analyses with 5,000 bias-corrected bootstrapped samples. As indicated earlier in the methodology chapter, mediation analysis is modelled on OLS regression which is better suited to continuous outcome variables. Accordingly, I examined the following mediated relationships with the original 7-point continuous outcome variable—*Hire2Base*—measuring employers’ willingness to hire an ex-offender post-disclosure of the applicant’s criminal record (1 = strongly disagree; 4 = unsure; 7 = strongly agree).

The results of the first simple mediation analysis confirms that *HardSkills* are fully mediated by *SoftSkills* with 36 percent ($R^2 = 0.36$, $p < .001$) of the variance in willingness to hire explained by this model. Full mediation is substantiated in Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1 above, which shows a reduction in strength and loss of significance between *HardSkills* and *Hire2Base* from the total effects, path c ($b = 0.33$; 95% CI = 0.24, 0.41, $p < .001$) to the direct effects, path c’ ($b = 0.06$; 95% CI = -.05, .18, $p = .283$). There is also a significant indirect effect, indicated by the absence of a zero in the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, between *HardSkills* and *Hire2Base* mediated through *SoftSkills* (X-M-Y) ($b = 0.26$; 95% CI = 0.16, 0.38). The indirect effect size of 29 percent ($K^2 = 0.28$, 95% CI = .17, .41) suggests *SoftSkills* moderately mediates the relationship between *HardSkills* and *Hire2Base*.

This mediation analysis provides empirical support for the claim that *SoftSkills* fully explain the relationship between *HardSkills* and employers’ willingness to hire (*Hire2Base*). This mediated relationship demonstrates that hard skills are instrumental for ex-offenders to signal their desistance from crime in that they provide the tangible means by which soft skills can be identified or implied (Fletcher, 2001). In other words, hard skills are important for employment outcomes for ex-offenders because of the role they play in communicating the ex-offender’s soft skills. However, it is the ex-offender’s soft skills that are fundamental to employers in their decision to hire an ex-offender (Bloom, 2012; Holzer et al., 2002; Visser et al., 2008).

Table 6.2

Path coefficients and indirect effects for simple mediation model (standard errors in parentheses) – HardSkills–Hire2Base, mediated by SoftSkills

| FROM \ TO | Path Coefficients | | Indirect Effects | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Hire2Base (Y) | Soft Skills (M) | Estimate | Bootstrap 95% CI |
| Hard Skills (X) | .06 (.06) | .76 (.04)*** | | |
| Soft Skills (M) | .34 (.06)*** | | | |
| Total | | | .33 (.04) | .24, .41*** |
| Specific: X- M -Y | | | .26 (.05) | .16, .38* |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: This mediation analysis accounted for all other MLR variables – *Race, Education, CrimHiredPos, BRGen*

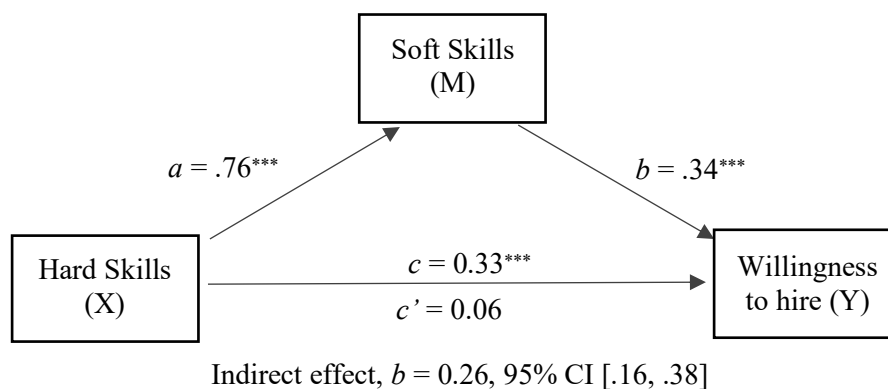


Figure 6.1 Simple mediation model depicting the relationship between HardSkills and Hire2Base, mediated by SoftSkills

Quantifying the Willingness to Hire Model – Part A: Do Signals of Desistance Influence the Association Between Belief in Redeemability and Willingness to Hire? (Quantitative Question 2)

In Chapter Two I explained that my proposed Willingness to Hire model was based on the premise put forward by social psychologists that individuating information counters the influence of stereotypical beliefs on the formation of impressions about others (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982; Pedulla, 2014). In a similar way, I expected employers' belief in redeemability, which, as a generalised belief about offenders' capacity to change and likened to stereotypes in this thesis, will be less predictive of hiring outcomes once an individual ex-offender's desistance becomes known via signalling. This led me to the supposition that desistance signals

mediate the relationship between belief in redeemability and hiring outcomes. As proxies for desistance signals, both *HardSkills* and *SoftSkills* may therefore explain the relationship in full or in part between *BRGen* and *Hire2Base*. Due to desistance signals being represented by two variables, *HardSkills* and *SoftSkills*, it is essential to test the independent mediating effect of each variable and then together in sequence, first through *HardSkills* (M_1), then through *SoftSkills* (M_2) (Hayes, 2013). My rationale for examining the indirect effects of both mediators in this order is theoretically guided by prior research that suggests hard skills are the primary tangible evidence by which soft skills then become known (Spence, 1973).

To test this supposition, I used the PROCESS macro (serial multiple mediation model 6) in SPSS (Hayes, 2012), to conduct a serial multiple mediation analysis which examines the total effect and total direct effect of *BRGen* on *Hire2*, sequentially mediated by *HardSkills* then *SoftSkills* (Hayes, 2013; Krieger & Sarge, 2013). As it relates to my thesis, and as expected, the relationship between employers' belief in redeemability and willingness to hire is mediated through ex-offender job applicants' hard skills and soft skills. The outcome of this serial multiple mediation model is depicted in Figure 6.2 with the corresponding results shown in Table 6.3.

Shown in path c, the total effect of *BRGen* on *Hire2Base* was significant ($b = 0.58$; 95% CI = 0.42, 0.73, $p < .001$) and accounts for 18% of the variance in employers' willingness to hire ($R^2 = 0.18$, $p < .001$). The total direct effect, path c', was also significant but decreased in strength and significance ($b = 0.26$; 95% CI = 0.10, 0.41, $p < .01$) from the total effect and accounts for 36% of the variance in employers' willingness to hire ($R^2 = 0.36$, $p < .001$). This demonstrates *HardSkills* and *SoftSkills* partially mediate the relationship between *BRGen* and *Hire2*. The indirect effect mediated through *HardSkills* (a_1b_1) is not significant indicated by the confidence interval containing a zero ($b = 0.04$; 95% CI = -0.04, 0.12). Conversely, the indirect effect mediated through *SoftSkills* is significant (a_2b_2) ($b = 0.12$; 95% CI = 0.05, 0.20, $p < .05$). The indirect effect size of 10% ($K^2 = 0.10$, 95% CI = 0.05, 0.16) suggests *HardSkills* and *SoftSkills* explain a fair mediating relationship between *BRGen* and *Hire2*. The serial multiple mediation test ($a_1d_2b_2$) was significant in this instance ($b = 0.16$; 95% CI = 0.08, 0.27, $p < .05$), thus providing empirical support for the sequential manner in which hard skills then soft skills partially explain the relationship between employers' belief in redeemability and their willingness to hire job applicants with a criminal record (Hayes, 2013).

These findings imply that the general beliefs employers hold about whether offenders can change and desist from crime do significantly predict the likelihood employers will hire a job applicant with a criminal record. However, when ex-offender job applicants are able to effectively demonstrate their desistance from crime via the hard skills and soft skills they possess, belief in redeemability is less influential on employers' hiring likelihood. In other words, ex-offenders cannot solely rely on employers' general beliefs about offenders' ability to change and desist from crime.

Ex-offenders must also play an integral part in the process of obtaining employment by actively demonstrating their desistance from crime and signal themselves as an exception from other ex-offenders with the same or similar offence characteristics who may not be desisters.

Table 6.3

Path coefficients and indirect effects for serial multiple mediation model (standard errors in parentheses) – BRGen–Hire2Base, mediated by HardSkills then SoftSkills

| FROM \ TO | Path Coefficients | | | Indirect Effects | |
|--|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Hire2Base (Y) | HardSkills (M ₁) | SoftSkills (M ₂) | Estimate | Bootstrap 95% CI |
| Belief in Redeemability (X) | .26 (.08)** | .61 (.09)*** | .35 (.07)*** | | |
| Hard Skill Signals (M ₁) | .06 (.06) | | .76 (.04)*** | | |
| Soft Skill Signals (M ₂) | .34 (.06)*** | | | | |
| Total | | | | .58 (.08) | .42, .73*** |
| Indirect: X- M ₁ -Y (a ₁ b ₁) | | | | .04 (.04) | -.04, .12 |
| Indirect: X- M ₂ -Y (a ₂ b ₂) | | | | .12 (.04) | .05, .20* |
| Indirect: X- M ₁ - M ₂ -Y (a ₁ d ₂₁ b ₂) | | | | .16 (.04) | .08, .27* |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: This mediation analysis accounted for all other MLR variables – Race, Education, CrimHiredPos

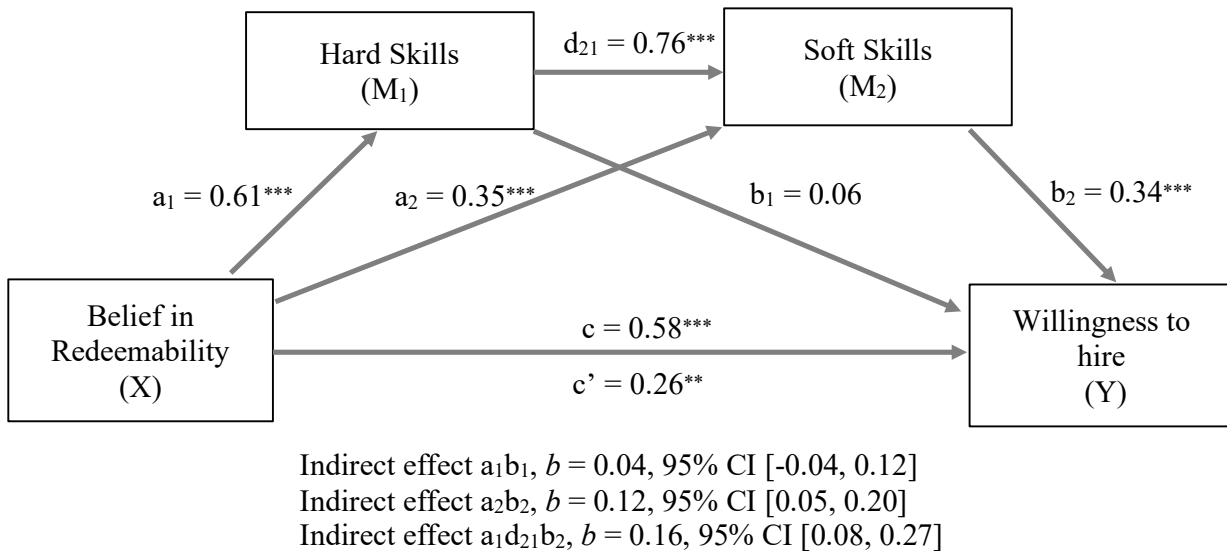


Figure 6.2 Serial multiple mediation model depicting the relationship between BRGen and Hire2Base, sequentially mediated by HardSkills then SoftSkills

This relationship between belief in redeemability and willingness to hire, mediated by desistance signals, supports my proposed Willingness to Hire model, inspired by the process of impression formation where stereotypical beliefs about others based on categorical information, such as a criminal record, are essentially fixed and not subject to malleability (Dovidio & Fazio, 1992; Fazio et al., 1995). Such stereotypes lead to generalised impressions about similarly categorised groups of individuals. However, when an individual from within a categorised group can provide additional counter-stereotypic information about him or herself, the influence of the initial belief is altered and decisions made about the individual are subject to malleability (Blair et al., 2001; Livingston & Brewer, 2002). These findings offer a promising prospect in circumstances where employers with lower beliefs in redeemability are contemplating an ex-offender for employment.

As it relates to this study and my Willingness to Hire model, employers approach their decisions about hiring ex-offenders with a pre-established belief about whether or not offenders can desist from crime. However, in circumstances where ex-offender job applicants signal themselves as desisters, employers' hiring decisions may shift from being determined by generally held beliefs about the capacity for offenders to change, to being governed by specific signals relevant to the individual ex-offender job applicant. Even so, these individual-level desistance signals do not fully mediate a belief in redeemability, with these generalised beliefs about whether offenders have the capacity to change still bearing some influence on employers' hiring decisions. Comparable to the way stereotypical beliefs are automatically activated in the process of impression formation (Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993), the likelihood that an ex-offender job applicant's criminal record will automatically trigger employers' beliefs about whether or not offenders are redeemable will remain the primary influence over hiring decisions. Without any additional contextual information signalling desistance, the ex-offender's capacity for desistance remains unknown to the employer and absent from their hiring decision. Nevertheless, employers' positions on hiring are not static. Instead, if an ex-offender has skills that are favourable to the employer, his or her hiring decision is open to change.

The importance for effectively signalling desistance, through demonstrating hard and soft skills, is highlighted by this fact as well as the survey findings outlined in this chapter showing that desistance signals improve employment outcomes for ex-offender job applicants. Since desistance signalling is valuable for ex-offenders' improved employment outcomes, further investigation is needed to establish what, in particular, signals desistance to employers and how these signals are effectively communicated and understood. Results from the phase two face-to-face interviews presented later in this chapter provides strong support for effective desistance signalling to depend upon the desistance signalling environment.

Quantifying the Willingness to Hire Model – Part B: Does Belief in Redeemability Influence the Association Between Desistance Signals and Willingness to Hire? (*Quantitative Question 3*)

It is promising to observe there is hope for ex-offenders seeking employment where signals of desistance from crime have the potential to shift employers' hiring decisions towards more favourable employment outcomes, even for employers with lower redeemability beliefs. Referring back to the Impression Formation model, social psychologists propose that stereotypical beliefs are either amplified or attenuated by individuating information, which gives the impression that stereotypes precede individuating information (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Kunda & Thagard, 1996). However, the picture is more complex. Social psychologists are not clear about the sequence of stereotypical beliefs and individuating information in the process of impression formation, and whether one precedes the other or vice versa (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). In consideration of this ambiguity for my Willingness to Hire model, I performed two additional simple mediation models to examine whether *BRGen* mediates the independent association between *HardSkills* and *Hire2Base*, and *Soft Skills* and *Hire2Base*.

In both cases, *BRGen* was found to mediate the association between both *HardSkills* and *SoftSkills*, and *Hire2Base*. Table 6.4 and Figure 6.3 indicates that *HardSkills* is mediated by *BRGen* with 29% ($R^2 = 0.29$, $p < .001$) of the variance in *Hire2Base* explained by this model. The direct effect, path c', remained significant ($b = 0.33$; 95% CI = 0.24, 0.41, $p < .001$), but reduced in strength from the total effect, path c ($b = 0.40$; 95% CI = 0.32, 0.48, $p < .001$).

Similarly, Table 6.5 and Figure 6.4 shows *BRGen* mediates the relationship between *SoftSkills* and *Hire2Base* where the total effect, path c, ($b = 0.44$; 95% CI = 0.37, 0.51, $p < .001$) reduced in strength but maintained significance in the total direct effects, path c' ($b = 0.39$; 95% CI = 0.31, 0.47, $p < .001$). This model explains 35% ($R^2 = 0.35$, $p < .001$) of the variance in *Hire2Base*. A small indirect effect size of 8% for the *HardSkills* model ($R^2 = 0.08$, $p < .05$) and 6% for the *SoftSkills* model ($R^2 = 0.06$, $p < .05$) is found. Even though the effect size is small, there are two possible explanations for the relationship between desistance signals and willingness to hire being mediated by belief in redeemability.

Table 6.4

Path coefficients and indirect effects for simple mediation model (standard errors in parentheses) – *Hard Skills–Hire2Base*, mediated by *BRGen*

| FROM \ TO | Path Coefficients | | Indirect Effects | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Hire2Base (Y) | Belief in Redeemability (M) | Estimate | Bootstrap 95% CI |
| HardSkills (X) | .33 (.04)*** | .19 (.03)*** | | |
| Belief in Redeemability (M) | .38 (.08)*** | | | |
| Total | | | .40 (.04) | .32, .48*** |
| Specific: X- M -Y | | | .07 (.02) | .04, .11* |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: This mediation analysis accounted for all other MLR variables – *Race*, *Education*, *CrimHiredPos*

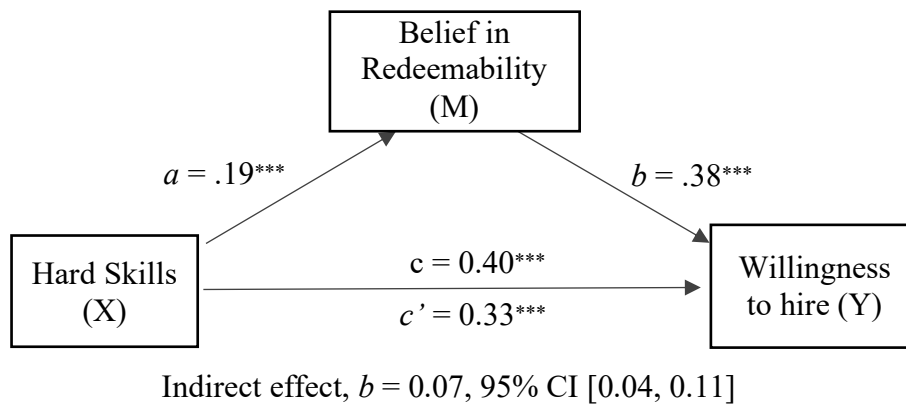


Figure 6.3 Simple mediation model depicting the relationship between *HardSkills* and *Hire2Base*, mediated by *BRGen*

Table 6.5

Path coefficients and indirect effects for simple mediation model (standard errors in parentheses) – Soft Skills–Hire2Base, mediated by BRGen

| FROM \ TO | Path Coefficients | | Indirect Effects | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | Hire2Base (Y) | Belief in Redeemability (M) | Estimate | Bootstrap 95% CI |
| SoftSkills (X) | .39 (.04)*** | .21 (.02)*** | | |
| Belief in Redeemability (M) | .25 (.08)** | | | |
| Total | | | .44 (.04) | .37, .51*** |
| Specific: X- M -Y | | | .05 (.02) | .02, .09* |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note: This mediation analysis accounted for all other MLR variables – *Race, Education, CrimHiredPos*

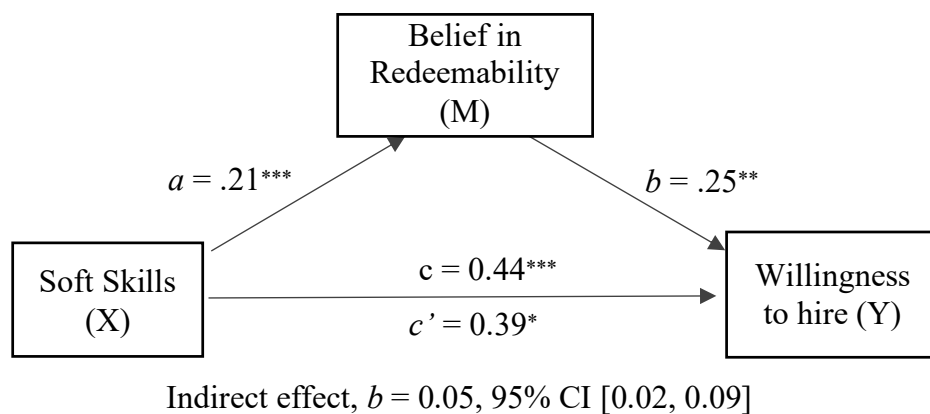


Figure 6.4 Simple mediation model depicting the relationship between SoftSkills and Hire2Base, mediated by BRGen

First, I draw upon the results outlined in Chapter Five where employers rating low on the redeemability scale expressed pessimistic attitudes about the capacity for ex-offenders to change and desist from crime. This same pessimism is likely to also be linked to judgements about the probability an ex-offender's desistance signals are indicative of genuine change. Consequently, underlying attitudes associated with low beliefs about redeemability will overshadow the association between desistance signals and willingness to hire.

The second plausible explanation aligns with the propositions put forward by social psychologists in relation to the process of impression formation (Asch, 1946; Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Holyoak & Spelman, 1993; Kunda & Thagard, 1996). In this instance, counter-

stereotypical individuating information can take precedence over and reduce the influence of pre-conceived stereotypical beliefs when forming impressions about others and lead to a different outcome. In such cases, individuating information shifts perceptions about the individual from being grounded in broad-level stereotypical beliefs about similarly categorised members of a social group (e.g. “offenders”) to individual-level beliefs based on personal attributes that set the individual apart. Similarly, signals of desistance are a form of individuating information that also exist at the individual-level, and serve to indicate the extent of desistance for the individual ex-offender. Under circumstances where desistance signals are communicated to prospective employers, broad-level beliefs about offenders’ redeemability remain influential. However, individual-level desistance signals that either amplify or attenuate (i.e. counter) employers’ redeemability beliefs then influence a different hiring outcome.

The Desistance Signalling Environment

My thematic analysis of the face-to-face interview data indicates that the efficacy of desistance signalling is dependent upon the quality of the desistance signalling environment. By way of deductive reasoning, I examined whether the signalling timeline (Connelly et al., 2011) was also applicable to the communication process by which ex-offenders’ desistance is signalled to employers. In Chapter Two I discussed how the quality of the signalling environment is determined by each of the four elements contained within the signalling timeline—signaller, signal, receiver and feedback—meeting certain criteria. Congruent with each element and associated criteria set out in Connelly and colleague’s (2011) signalling timeline model, the findings of my thematic analysis provide strong support for the application of the signalling timeline to the specific context within which employers are able to ascertain an ex-offender job applicant’s desistance from crime in ways that are valuable to employers. Guided by these elements and associated criteria, the implication here is that ex-offenders can strategically formulate a desistance signalling design to effectively communicate their desistance to prospective employers.

To guide my explanation of these results, I apply my adapted desistance signalling timeline. Figure 6.5 depicts my adapted ‘*desistance signalling timeline*’ within the ‘*desistance signalling environment*’. The remainder of this chapter addresses the two qualitative questions designed to examine what signals ex-offenders’ desistance to employers and how these signals are effectively communicated.

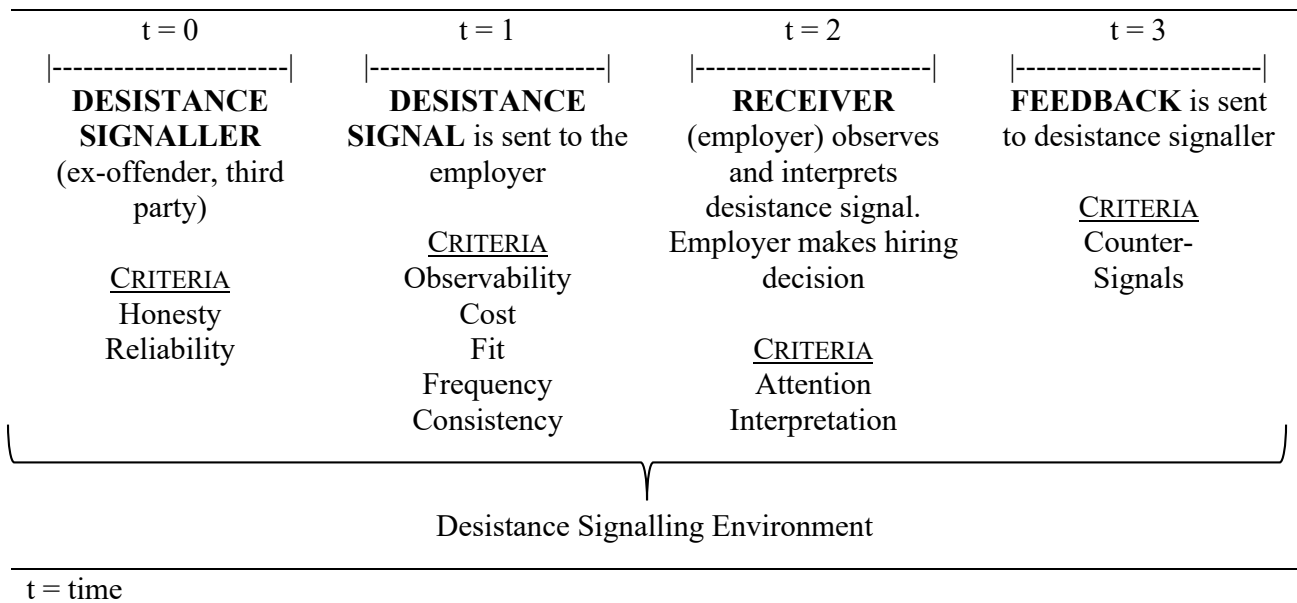


Figure 6.5 Desistance Signalling Timeline. Adapted from “Signaling theory: A review and assessment,” by B. Connelly, T. Certo, R. D. Ireland, and C. R. Reutzel, 2011, *Journal of Management*, 37, p. 44. Copyright 2011 by The Author(s)

Sending Signals of Desistance in the Desistance Signalling Timeline: What Kind of Signals Suggest Desistance from Crime to Employers? (Qualitative Question 1)

The desistance signaller. Within the desistance signalling environment, there are two types of signallers able to communicate signals indicating the ex-offender job applicant’s likely desistance. The first is the ex-offender job applicant himself or herself, and the second is a third-party contributor to the employment process, such as a previous employer, job agency or parole officer. Occupying an ‘insider’ position, the signaller possesses information that may be indicative of the ex-offender’s desistance from crime, which is not yet known but potentially useful to the prospective employer, the ‘outsider’. More recent extensions to signalling theory suggest that insider information provides the signaller with an upper hand where the signaller has the power to mitigate problems due to information asymmetry in decision-making processes (Spence, 2002; Stiglitz, 2000). Information asymmetry arises where one party holds (or withholds) information that could potentially be useful to another in making decisions (Connelly, et al., 2011).

As it relates to my thesis, I argue that ex-offenders or third parties hold the insider position, by virtue of possessing information that may be valuable to the prospective employer as a convincing indication of the ex-offender’s desistance. In contrast, at the outset of making hiring decisions about an ex-offender, employers may have little to no knowledge of the ex-offender’s desistance from crime. This creates a gap, or asymmetry of information (Spence, 1973), for employers between what they perceive about an ex-offender job applicant’s desistance and what they could potentially know

with more certainty if provided with the relevant information. Closing this gap with strong, convincing desistance signals reduces information asymmetry and potentially improves employers' willingness to hire. Therefore, it is crucial to communicate desistance via signals that are meaningful to employers.

Whether or not desistance signal information is valuable to prospective employers first depends on the quality of the desistance signaller(s). Thematic analysis of my interview data lends support to the proposition that the ex-offender or third party's quality as a signaller is gauged by the same two criteria as those contained within Connelly and colleague's (2011) signalling timeline – *honesty* and *reliability*. Bearing in mind Johnstone and Grafen's (1993) argument, the ex-offender and possibly the third party stand to benefit from an employer's favourable hiring decision, thus there is potential to communicate dishonest desistance signals in order to increase the ex-offender's employability appeal. For this reason, indicators of honesty and reliability indicate the quality of the ex-offender or third party signaller and minimise any suspicions of deceit (Cohen & Dean, 2005; Durcikova & Gray, 2009). Together, the honesty and reliability of the ex-offender or third party serve as an indication of his or her inherent character and therefore trustworthiness.

The themes around vulnerability, transparency and trustworthiness emerging from my analysis indicate that employers feel more certain about their ability to gauge the honesty and reliability of ex-offenders as signallers than third parties. This seems to be connected with what employers perceive to be factors motivating each signaller to engage with the employer, as well as the risk each signaller takes in terms of what they stand to lose by signalling honestly. For ex-offenders, the risks of exposing or concealing their offending past and what they stand to lose in the context of obtaining employment, are far greater than any risk to third parties.

The employers in my study indicated that they would judge an ex-offender signaller's honesty in different ways and in different contexts. Open admissions about having a criminal record serves as an indication the ex-offender is an honest signaller in that the employer is not left to find out in alternative ways, which may suggest the ex-offender is attempting to conceal that information. Conversely, criminal record information revealed to employers through third party sources, such as a police background check, discredits the ex-offender's honesty, subsequently impacting upon whether or not the ex-offender can be trusted:

If they were up front and honest and told you about it immediately, I would take that as more of a positive step, than a negative step, because if you had to find out by doing a police check or something like that, that's not the way forward, I would [...] if they were up front and honest and told you about it immediately, I would expect to be told [...].
(Justin, aged 31-40, business owner, construction and trade industry)

I'd want to know up front because if they did have a criminal history and they didn't tell you about it and you did find out about it later, again it comes back to that trust thing. (William, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

Part of being transparent about what the ex-offender's criminal record characteristics involve demonstrates to the employer the ex-offender's honesty and fosters a sense of empathy for employers that nobody is immune from transgression:

I would like them to be straight up and honest and say 'look, I've been to jail for this'. You know that's what I like, honesty. None of us are bloody perfect, you know? (Caleb, business owner, aged over 51, construction and trade industry)

A sense of vulnerability in having the courage to be honest about a criminal record also serves as an indicator of the ex-offender signaller's honesty to employers. Being vulnerable in making open admissions about a criminal record suggests that the ex-offender is making legitimate attempts to change and therefore can be trusted as honest signallers. Toby describes this hypothetically in the context of an ex-offender proactively seeking work:

"By the way I need to tell you I do have a criminal record", I mean that to me, it is probably an indicator, if they haven't changed that they're trying to change and also displaying...um...honesty. [...] I mean it takes a fair bit of guts to even come in and ask for a job, let alone saying "oh by the way I got a criminal record", you know? If someone is prepared to do that they must be having a fair crack at changing things. (Toby, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Unlike ex-offenders representing only themselves, third party signallers can take a variety of forms. For instance, some third parties might be a previous employer of the job applicant; others might be a job placement agency. While employers provided clear examples of how they might ascertain an ex-offender's honesty, they tend to perceive third party signallers as being motivated by self-serving agendas and therefore driven to be less honest. A strong emerging theme was that employers felt third party signallers' honesty depends upon their motivation to signal desistance on the ex-offender's behalf. Generally, employers perceive third party's priorities are not associated with looking after the employer's best interests, but rather procuring government funds in exchange for placing hard to employ people, reaching monthly placement quotas, or getting rid of a problematic employee, undeterred by whether or not this may lead to a detrimental outcome for the employer. As an example, Alica recounts her experience of having received favourable references for job applicants

in the past, which later became apparent as being driven by a motivation to move on an unwanted employee. Such experiences foster a general sense that references cannot be trusted:

I've been caught in the past employing people who had great references that were absolutely hopeless and it came down to... they only had a good reference because that employer wanted to get rid of them... so... and I've done it myself. Normally I'm very honest in referee checks, but there have been some people where I've gone 'oh yeah, they'd be really good for you... please take them'. So, I would take that thing [a reference] with a grain of salt. (Alica, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

As third party desistance signallers, employment agencies are viewed similarly, where the suspected motivations for sourcing employment for ex-offenders brings into question the signaller's honesty. In my analysis, employers perceive employment agencies as indiscriminate in their recommendations, prioritising their own interests of meeting financial and quota targets over the employer's interests of acquiring a suitable employee. However, as this is not made explicitly obvious to employers, the assumption is that, as third-party signallers, employment agencies adopt dishonest or misleading business practices in order to present the prospective ex-offender employee as a favourable candidate, but for the ultimate aim of meeting their own needs:

They'll [employment agencies] sell anybody as being a great person... just like... 'yes, had an issue, but has moved on from that and just needs the opportunity, needs to be given a chance, blah blah blah', but they all say that because that's their job. (Joel, aged over 51, business owner, retail and services industry)

[...] we don't like using them [employment agencies]... um... cos they're just, we don't think they screen enough [...] I think it's money driven, they're not about putting that person with that job. I think because it's a government sponsored thing, or you know they get a [...] "If we get fifteen through this week, we've made twenty grand as opposed to only put six through this week. (Cameron, aged over 51, director, retail and services industry)

Nevertheless, employers are open to some third-party signallers that meet certain criteria deemed to validate their honesty. For instance, there was a strong sense amongst the employers in my study that third party signallers were considered to be honest when personally known to the employer. In addition, having a pre-established reputation for being trustworthy, or holding a notable position

in society, keeps third parties in some way accountable to being honest by virtue of having too much to lose by being dishonest as explained by Nicholas:

It would really have to be someone that I knew to make that [a reference] valid, who I knew the stature of that person as well so I could make a judgement of the person writing it, you know what I mean? [...] but if it came from a judge or from the case worker, I don't know them from a bar of soap, but if it came from [*name of person known to Nicholas*] or somebody that I knew who I've known for a long time and know the stature of the person, then that would have validity for me. But that's a big ask, to ask whether that person knows someone or knows the person, do you know what I mean? But that would be the only time it (a reference) would have any value for me. (Nicholas, aged 41-50, director, retail and services industry)

Reliability, the second criteria indicating the signaller's quality in Connelly et al's (2011) signalling timeline, also emerged as a theme in the interview data. Honesty and reliability are closely linked where honesty is concerned with the quality of the ex-offender's or third party's character, whereas reliability is concerned with the quality of the ex-offender's or third party's ability to communicate desistance in a trustworthy manner. Reliability is essentially the link between honesty and the desistance signal being communicated where the signaller's behaviour must be consistent with the signal being communicated and not exaggerated. In other words, what signallers say and what they do must match. For example, in the desistance signalling environment, an ex-offender's behaviour must be consistent with desistance to show they are reliable signallers. My analysis suggests employers establish ex-offender and third-party signallers' reliability in different ways and that this is largely associated with honesty for both being assessed differently also.

Employers described gauging the reliability of ex-offenders being dependent upon their claims of change or desistance being believable. When discussing how ex-offenders might present as believable, employers identified congruence between behavioural indicators and attitudes that are counter to offending behaviour as trustworthy ways to ascertain the reliability of ex-offenders as desistance signallers. For Gabriel, the ex-offender's active attempts to find work indicated the ex-offender could be considered reliable:

It's possible [for someone to change], but they've got to want to... you know... I mean, if somebody thinks that the world owes them something, that's not wanting to change, you know, that's not going out... it's about going out and saying "what can I do for other people that also will benefit me in say, an income". (Gabriel, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Ex-offenders' claims of desistance are also supported by successfully refraining from offending behaviour over a substantial period of time. Some employers perceive this as the *proof in the pudding* which renders the ex-offender as a reliable signaller. The evidence undeniably confirms that the ex-offender's signalling is an accurate reflection of reality and therefore an indication of their reliability:

If someone has done something 20 years ago and they haven't repeated anything since, well they are...you know, they're a given for me. They've learned their lesson as far as I'm concerned. I got trust. Full stop. I've got trust, yeah the time factor would give the trust pretty well straightaway as far as putting any judgements against their criminal record. (Timothy, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

Employers also perceived that being able to sustain responsibilities is an indication that the ex-offender is reliable. Having responsibilities suggests to employers that other people are relying on the ex-offender to fulfil their obligations in accordance with those responsibilities. Echoed within these ideas are those of Sampson and Laub's (1993, 2003), where having the opportunity to engage in informal social controls creates a turning point for offenders to 'knife off' from crime. As it relates to the context of employers hiring decisions, bearing responsibility to themselves and others anchors ex-offenders to maintaining their stake in conformity. Along these lines, Brodie says "I think people do irresponsible things when they don't have responsibilities. People who have responsibilities are less likely to do dodgy things and take on high risk behaviours". Where there is some evidence that ex-offenders are living up to their responsibilities, the employers in my study, such as Jamie, viewed this as a positive indication of non-offending behaviour and, in turn, are able to trust that the ex-offender is reliable:

To me that [joining a community group] would say that they are well and truly on the mend, obviously repentant of what they've done so they want to move on in life. "Ok so that's behind me that's past, time to move and progress". So to me, it would be a good character who's trying. (Jamie, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Conversely, when ex-offenders' narratives are inconsistent with what would be expected of a desister, employers begin to question the reliability of the ex-offender as signaller. Employers in this study highlighted ex-offenders' attitudes or narratives that indicate continued problems, thereby suggesting to employers that change has not yet occurred. For example, employers considered that what an ex-offender says indicates whether or not their change is genuine and in turn whether they can be trusted as a reliable signaller, as illustrated by Joel and Dominic:

[...] you know when you start getting these really farfetched, incredible, I've heard them all...stories, you know...um...you start to think "yeah, this is not really panning the way it should be for a person who's really wanting to rehabilitate and get on with their life". (Joel, aged over 51, business owner, retail and services industry)

I suppose it's their attitude really [...] you know if they were constantly down on themselves or down on everything about anything um...you'd probably get the impression that um...you know they're um...still troubled. (Dominic, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Determining the reliability of third party signallers is challenging for employers. There are few options for employers to evaluate whether ex-offenders' desistance, communicated via third party signallers, is determined in a rigorous or legitimate way. Employers relayed a sense that processes and associated assessments in place to provide third party information, such as a reference or certificate of attainment, may be weak or carried out by assessors with little interest in providing an accurate appraisal of the ex-offender. Although tangible evidence, like obtaining a work qualification, might seem consistent with desistance, without fully knowing the conditions under which they are obtained, employers remain uncertain and sceptical about the reliability of third party signallers. The following interview excerpts illustrate employers' lack of faith in certificates and references, which they attribute to not knowing the rigor involved in obtaining certifications or the lack of accountability in providing an accurate evaluation of an ex-offender's capabilities:

There's always [*emphasis added*] a loophole somewhere. It's just how hard are you prepared to work to find the loophole and get around it, how cast iron tight is the system, how infallible is the person doing the testing... all those sorts of things... and how badly does the person want to get past? How easily can the person get past? "oh, I'm clean, I've got nothing to hide"... yep, straight through, no problem at all. (Jason, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

I just think that anyone can write anything down about anyone on a piece of paper, and really particularly people don't take a lot of notice...I mean people write nice references for people on a piece of paper because they don't want to be confrontational and give them a "here, here's your reference, it says you're a tool" (Jordan, aged over 51, director, construction and trade industry)

To ascertain credibility as a desistance signaller both ex-offenders and third parties must satisfy the two criteria of honesty and reliability in different ways. The analysis thus far suggests that employers prefer ex-offenders over third parties as signallers within the desistance signalling environment. Employers explained that this is due to being able to formulate their own assessments about the quality of ex-offenders as signallers via the personal narratives ‘heard from the horse’s mouth’, coupled with observing behaviours that together are consistent with desistance from crime. Conversely, there were clear challenges with establishing the honesty and reliability of third party signallers. Employers perceive third party signallers as motivated by their own self-serving agendas. Although employers did identify conditions that could potentially minimise their pre-existing mistrust in or scepticism about the process by which third party recommendations and assessments are made, this same kind of mistrust and scepticism amongst employers did not seem to exist in relation to ex-offender signallers. Perceptions of honesty and reliability for both ex-offender and third party signallers is related to the quality of the signal, which appears next in the desistance signalling timeline.

The desistance signal. The second element along the desistance signalling timeline is the desistance signal itself. Desistance signals are meaningful to employers when signallers produce convincing indications of desistance, which employers determine by assessing the quality of the desistance signals being communicated. Again, I show that employers assess desistance signal quality by the same five criteria as those in Connelly et al’s (2011) signalling timeline – *observability*, *cost*, *fit*, *consistency*, and *frequency*. How these criteria are met again differ depending on whether the signaller is the ex-offender him or herself, or a third party communicating desistance signals on behalf of the ex-offender. I discuss each of these below in turn.

First, in terms of noticing desistance signals, employers described specific ways that an ex-offender might make their desistance from crime *observable*, via interpersonal interaction with employers. Making signals observable through interaction with employers is not only restricted to providing concrete evidence, but also appealing to employers’ perceptions that change has occurred. Employers explained that ex-offenders could make desistance signals observable by proactively demonstrating a desire to change through seeking out opportunities to do so. For example, Lola identified a number of strategies personally driven by ex-offenders themselves as being an observable signal of desistance:

I suppose going out and trying to seek honest employment is one of the steps that makes a difference, going through some sort of rehabilitation process, um... maybe even taking courses that help build self-awareness and help re-direct into a good direction. (Lola, aged 41-50, human resources, retail and services industry)

Similarly, some employers believed they would see desistance signals manifest through ex-offenders' non-verbal communication via body language, reactions and presentation. Again, gauging these forms of non-verbal communication relies on interpersonal interaction for employers to observe. William illustrates how he would draw on a conversation about the offending history to gauge the ex-offender's non-verbal response:

I think my technique would be to come outright and say "look, you've got a criminal history, honestly, what do you think your chances of re-offending are?" And get an idea from their facial expressions, that way. It's probably going to be a pretty shocking thing to say and it might even be a little bit offensive, but you'll get a bit of a read from them and if they're honestly trying to see, trying to change and do what they need to do, um, yeah, depending on their reactions. (William, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

As the above excerpts indicate, desistance signal observability is most effectively facilitated through direct interaction between the employer and ex-offender. In the absence of such interaction, the observability of desistance signals is diminished significantly and the risk that the ex-offenders' desistance remains unnoticed is increased. Attesting to this, there is no data in my analysis to suggest third parties are an effective way by which desistance signals are made observable. Even though a third party signaller might comprise an observable artefact, such as a written reference or an accreditation certificate, without accompanying detail to flag such artefacts as reliable, the associated desistance signal remains less visible.

In addition to observability, employers acknowledge that higher quality desistance signals come at a *cost* to ex-offenders by way of investing their own time and effort into some form of meaningful or altruistic activity that act as signals of desistance (see Chapter 2 and Bushway & Apel, 2012; Krebs & Dawkins, 1984; Maruna, 2012; Spence, 1973 for a similar argument). For instance, contributing voluntarily to community endeavours where there is no obvious return or benefit costs the ex-offender in both time and effort:

For me, it comes back to the whole community interaction, what they do probably as a volunteer. Um...their presence in a community, there's lots of things that they can do, so um, do you know, it's the...Clean Up Australia Day...um...getting involved in that, the local show, so there's so much preparation that can go on that from a volunteer perspective, being involved and assisting with that type of thing...it might be small, but it's your [the ex-offender's] way of contributing and giving back. (Anna, aged 41-50, human resources, construction and trade industry)

For other employers, costs associated with quality desistance signals are more reputational or affective than costs to the ex-offender's personal resource. Madison exemplifies this with the example of cold-call job hunting and the courage it takes to do so:

It, it can be quite embarrassing or intimidating to some people to walk into any place of employment and hand in their resume [...] if you've got enough guts to walk around and really want to look for work, then you know I'd take that on board probably more than somebody who just goes to an employment agency and lets them do all the running around for them. (Madison, aged 31-40, manager, retail and services industry)

Employers believe the involvement of a third party also comes at a cost. However, employers anticipate that this cost tends to also fall to the ex-offender in the context of validating the quality of their desistance signals. In this regard, obtaining a certified accreditation from a third party is assessed by the extent of investment made by the ex-offender to meet the requirements of the accreditation. The more demanding the requirements, the greater the cost, thus indicating a higher quality desistance signal. One employer referred to the time and effort required of the ex-offender with reference to attaining a Certificate of Rehabilitation as a valuable indicator of desistance if the cost involved required a high level of commitment from the ex-offender:

[...] certificate would be earned by doing voluntary community type stuff, would show the genuineness that they want to...you know...it costs and it hurts, because that shows a desire. If there is a cost and hurt involved that shows a desire to [change]...but there's a goal they're trying to achieve and that is getting somewhere better. (Anthony, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Referring to the same Certificate of Rehabilitation idea, a mistrust in assessment processes also amplifies the value of signal cost. This resonates with Maruna's (2014) comments about few people trusting the opinion of experts proclaiming who is rehabilitated. In this regard, employers described how weak assessments of the ex-offender's rehabilitation devalue the quality of desistance signals, but in contrast assessments requiring robust assessment is a valuable signal of desistance for employers:

Like, if their criteria is to get out of bed on time and have their room tidy and be neat and responsible... not interested. But if there's something more specific about, um... an alcoholic who hasn't... who's been tested daily for a month or whatever and they've

passed it...all power to ya. I'd give that a lot more value than not. (Audrey, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

[...] provided it [certificate] was checkable and you could actually speak to the person who signed that certificate and just from a conversation you'd be able to tell that this person was just pushing people out the door and signing pieces of paper, saying "yeah yeah good luck" or whether it was someone who was genuinely invested in rehabilitating that criminal. (Harrison, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Observability and cost of desistance signals could potentially lose value to employers if the signal communicated inadequately represents desistance. Signal *fit* is therefore critical for effective desistance signalling strategies. Signal fit refers to whether the signals communicated to employers are feasible representations of desistance. What employers conceptualise as signals that fit with desistance is supported by previous research, which suggests that desistance signals are not necessarily linked directly with desistance per se, but are indicative of a productive citizen and therefore a non-offender (Schirri, 2012). Employers in this study likewise associate desistance from crime, being an intangible reality, with evidence that is consistent with non-offending behaviour. Consequently, employers assess signal fit by whether and how an ex-offender's lifestyle is different to, or has changed from, what they perceive was the ex-offender's previous criminal lifestyle. For instance while talking about identifying desistance, Ryder says "it's probably the crime, how long ago it was committed and what they've done in the interim to show you that they may have changed". Jamie also looks for evidence of a life lived differently in order to distinguish between the ex-offender's pre- and post- desistance life:

Well...I suppose essentially first you'd have to establish, you know what I mean, what, to what degree their crime impacted on their life, you know why did they, what did they do....the crime... um... but then what are they doing about it? What are they trying to do to improve themselves? Have they joined a group, etc...? (Jamie, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Conversely, ex-offenders behaving in ways that are incongruent with their claims of desistance constitutes a signal misfit, sending an alternative message to employers about the likelihood for desistance. Nevertheless, a signal misfit may not be obvious at the time of hiring but manifest with the test of time. In the quote below Gabriel acknowledges this possibility and comments about the types of behavioural indicators he would be wary of that may challenge earlier signals of desistance:

If I did know that I was taking someone on that came out of prison I'd also watch who they're hanging around with. If they're hanging around with the same sorts of people, then they're going to commit an offence again [...] if they're in pubs and drinking and whatever else and come to work hungover or whatever else then you know they're not really wanting to change [...]. (Gabriel, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Employers also indicated third party signallers as an alternative way to assess the fit of an ex-offender's desistance signals. In this context, third party signallers are not called upon by employers to provide additional signals on behalf of the ex-offender. Rather, employers turn to third party signallers to corroborate their own evaluation about whether the ex-offender's communicated signals accurately represent his or her desistance. This approach to assessing the fit of a signal via third parties is a method described by employers to double-check whether the ex-offender's account or demonstration of his or her desistance is authentic. Obtaining a third party signaller's account of the ex-offender's past performance in a work setting or through interaction with others enables the employer to substantiate whether past experience others have encountered with the ex-offender corresponds with desistance from crime, or whether the ex-offender is simply putting on a front. In the example that follows, Jason anticipates he would seek confirmation about whether the ex-offender's conduct while still in prison is indicative of conduct that is associated with non-offending behaviour:

I would maybe make contact with the prison system and see what reports there were and what behaviour was conducted, whether they worked in the workshops there and showed good skills and good work ethics. (Jason, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

A similar approach, described in the next quote, is to obtain information from third party signallers, but this time with regards to potential problems that may have manifest during the ex-offender's previous work role. This strategy enables employers to confirm or dismiss any uncertainties they may have about the ex-offender's desistance signal as a good (or otherwise) fit with representing his or her desistance:

If I'm in doubt I will go straight to the manager or to a payroll person and just say 'hey you had this person on your payroll, what... can you give me any information, what sick days, you know work attendance, and quite often what the reason was they left that job', you know? (Justin, aged 31-40, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Pursuant to the signalling timeline (Connelly et al., 2011), the final two criteria by which the quality of desistance signals can be determined are *frequency* and *consistency*. Frequency is a quantifying criteria that refers to the number of times desistance is signalled. In accordance with Connelly and colleagues' (2011) proposition, the more times a desistance signal is transmitted, the more the efficacy of the desistance signalling environment should improve. Unlike other criteria required to assess desistance signal quality, frequency of signalling does not require any other specific conditions to be met to satisfy the criteria. For this reason, signalling frequency is more of a strategy to be incorporated into desistance signalling design, as opposed to an intentional criteria by which employers assess signal quality.

Consistency, on the other hand, is concerned with some uniformity between multiple different signals in that they all ultimately signal the same thing, which, in the context of ex-offenders and employers, is desistance. Although employers do not explicitly articulate the value of consistency as a criteria for assessing signal quality, the range of signals employers cite as signalling desistance suggests ex-offenders have at their disposal a number of ways to send the same message about their desistance from crime. For some employers, being open and transparent about having a criminal history meets the criteria of signaller honesty and also serves as an indication of wanting to or having changed, as illustrated in Jonathon's response below. Yet Anna perceives that desistance is signalled via a sense of reciprocity between the ex-offender and the community where the community provides opportunities for the ex-offender and the ex-offender engages with those opportunities. Anna's example aligns with signal cost. Both of the following examples present vastly different ways to transmit the same consistent signal of desistance to employers:

Definitely not trying to hide it would definitely.....then you know, well they may not be ashamed of it or anything but they're not trying to hide it, you know they say 'look, this is how it is, this was the past and I'm moving on, trying to do better things' (Jonathon, aged 18-30, business owner, construction and trade industry)

For me it's about their interaction...um...their community value. So, how they are received back in the community, but not only that, what they do in the community [...]. Not only that... how they carry themselves. (Anna, aged 41-50, human resources, construction and trade industry)

Having at their disposal a range of desistance signalling options provides ex-offenders with some flexibility in being able to communicate to employers one specific message (their desistance from crime), in a variety of ways. This is critical for desistance signalling efficacy because what one employer regards as valuable desistance signals might be completely disregarded by another. Yet, it

is not possible for ex-offenders to know in advance what particular desistance signals a prospective employer values. To be prepared, it is crucial for ex-offenders to have a range of signalling options at their disposal to maximise the efficacy of the desistance signalling environment. For this reason, when designing desistance signalling strategies, ex-offenders should deliberately incorporate a variety of signals, each consistent with desistance from crime, to cater to differential preferences from one employer to the next. Failure to do so may result in the possibility that the desistance signal is not noticed, valued or interpreted accurately by employers.

Receiving Signals of Desistance in the Signalling Timeline: How Do Employers Make Sense of Desistance Signals? (*Qualitative Question 2*)

The second question posed here seeks to understand how desistance, an abstract feature of an ex-offender's life, can be communicated to employers in a concrete way. Being a form of communication, the way desistance signals are received is determined by the processes of transmission between the signaller and the receiver (Connelly et al., 2011), being the ex-offender or third party, and the employer, respectively. Results from the interview data suggest that desistance signals communicated by the ex-offender him or herself typically occurs via a direct transmission between the ex-offender and employer. Desistance signals communicated by a third party typically occurs via an indirect transmission whereby third parties act as a type of go-between and signal on behalf of the ex-offender. Both forms of transmission have implications for employers' evaluations of desistance signals.

The desistance signal receiver. In accordance with Connelly and colleagues' (2011) signalling timeline and applied to my desistance signalling timeline, whether or not desistance signals are received and understood accurately depends upon two criteria – *receiver attention* and *interpretation*. As explained in Chapter Two and revisited briefly here, receiver attention refers to signal receivers being alert to transmitted signals in order to recognise them. Interpretation refers to the meaning receivers attach to the transmitted signal and whether the receiver's attached meaning is consistent with the signaller's intended meaning. For instance, an ex-offender may produce evidence of gaining a trade qualification as a way of signalling to employers his or her desistance from crime. The efficacy of the desistance signalling environment then depends on the employer's attention in first recognising the qualification as a signal and then interpreting the qualification as signalling the ex-offender's desistance. A failure to pay attention means desistance may go unrecognized. This need to pay attention to signals of desistance amplifies the importance of signal consistency whereby multiple signals of desistance are communicated since employers may recognise only a few, or alternatively, be focussed on looking for particular signals of desistance.

Through analysis of the interview data it is apparent that employers differentially recognise

desistance signals in accordance with their belief in redeemability rating. Employers with a low belief in redeemability ($n = 15$) experience some difficulty identifying desistance signals, where the capacity to recognise change can be obscured by the ex-offender's criminal record, with little ability to see past his or her criminal history. The focus for these employers is on offence-centric signals, such as further incidences of offending, instead of desistance-centric signals. Rather than attempting to gauge the ex-offender's desistance, employers with low redeemability beliefs place the onus on ex-offenders to satisfy a range of conditions to prove their desistance. Even then, these conditions may not necessarily convince employers with low redeemability beliefs of desistance.

I established in the previous results chapter that employers with a low belief in redeemability do not necessarily deny the possibility of desistance, however, emerging themes from the interview data suggest this cohort of employers encounter difficulties in recognising desistance. This may be explained by their pessimism about the probability of desistance. The narratives about how desistance is recognised by employers with low redeemability beliefs echo these pessimistic attitudes. Among the interviewees in this study who demonstrated low belief in redeemability, some were unable to explicitly identify what signals of desistance would be noticeable to them as indicators of change and could only speculate broadly about observed behaviour that might signal desistance. This uncertainty about what to look for is illustrated in Toby's response, who has a low belief in redeemability and says "Don't know (how to tell if someone has changed). You can probably see it in some of their behaviour and stuff like that you know what I mean?" Christian's response below captures performance-based signs by which employers might be able to notice desistance, but seems to experience some difficulty in providing context around what the ex-offender's performance might look like to make their desistance recognisable:

Well they've got to show they've changed [...] if he worked with someone else and he was on the right track and showed self-discipline and.... I don't know... I've never experienced it, so I can't really answer that question. [...] they've got to be normal, they've got to be normal and not do what they were doing before, because it wasn't working.... You've got to change... that's... it's not rocket science. (Christian, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Employers in the mid redeemability beliefs tertile ($n = 14$) report with a little more certainty about how to recognise desistance signals. Similar to employers with low redeemability beliefs, those with a mid-way belief in redeemability emphasise performance-based indicators to recognise desistance. By way of comparison, employers with mid-way beliefs are also attuned to looking for work or personal behaviours that indicate change of inherent character and therefore desistance from crime. In this regard, attributional explanations of desistance are a useful way to summarise how

desistance is noticed by employers with mid-way beliefs. In the quotes that follow, employers recognise desistance associated with who the person is (classical attribution) manifest by how he or she behaves in a given context (positivist attribution). For example, Mitchell feels that examining trends within the ex-offender's work history sheds light on his or her inherent character and associated desistance. In other words, what is manifest on the outside allows you to see what is on the inside:

If I had someone that showed me that...“OK, I’ve been institutionalized from here to here for this reason and then given the jobs after you can see that I’m a hard worker, but each one only lasted for three months because I cannot hold a job down because I either do something wrong, or my attitude gets in the way” or something like that...You can pick up that if they’ve had more starts than Phar Lap¹¹, they’re not rehabilitated [...] but if you look at a person’s work history, you can see how stable they are. If there are 10-year blocks, I’ve got no problem with that. (Mitchell, aged 41-50, director, retail and services industry).

As well as performance indicators, employers with mid redeemability beliefs also recognise other indications of change within the ex-offender's sphere of influence as signalling possible desistance. Drawing on positivist attributional explanations, Alica evaluates desistance by noticeable signals such as a change in the ex-offender's physical location in order to disconnect from his or her previous life in which their offending occurred and moving away from influential others:

[...] if you have a repeat criminal record in somewhere like Toowoomba, Toowoomba's a small place. You're always going to come across that same element and be involved in that same social pattern...so if somebody says to me “Well, I got in to trouble at the Sunshine Coast and I’ve moved to Toowoomba”, that would say to me “well, they’ve left that behind”. They’ve moved to a new place, new start, that sort of thing. (Alica, aged 41-50, owner, construction and trade industry)

Compared to employers with a low or mid belief in redeemability, employers with a high belief in redeemability identify, with greater certainty, numerous ways desistance signals are recognised. Employers at the high end of the redeemability continuum notice desistance by the types of activities an ex-offender may engage in and place a greater emphasis on inherent qualities as well as the

¹¹ Phar Lap is an iconic Australian champion race horse that won 37 out of 51 race starts (National Museum Australia, 2014). The saying “more starts than Phar Lap” refers to someone who has attempted something countless times. Although Phar Lap is usually revered as a legend in Australian sporting history, quite the opposite is meant about someone with more starts than Phar Lap.

personal attributes he or she exhibits. Employers with a high belief are also highly attentive to either identifying desistance or not placing any importance on identifying desistance at all. Chloe, who associated desistance with the ex-offender's personal motivation, illustrates this. At the same time she feels an emphasis on actively seeking information about a criminal history to be irrelevant, which then negates the need to identify desistance:

[desistance is identified by] willingness to work and enthusiasm. To be quite honest in all the hundreds of people I've employed, I've never asked 'do you have a criminal history?' because you know, it happened in the past and...and...some people made the mistake, but I've never asked that question. (Chloe, aged 31-40, owner, retail and services industry)

Alternatively, attentiveness to particular features of the ex-offender's own social networks provides a noticeable signal of desistance due to the associated responsibilities he or she has to others within those networks. There is an interesting and subtle difference between redeemability tertile groupings here. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how some employers with low or mid redeemability beliefs felt that change depended on shouldering responsibilities—they are a catalyst for change to occur. Here, employers with high redeemability beliefs, such as Flynn, recognise taking on responsibilities as a noticeable indicator of having changed:

I think the biggest thing you really notice is that they really start to shoulder some responsibility, they actually start to become aware of their actions and, in a lot of cases it's got to do with family [...] you chuck in a good woman and a couple of kids and lot of those guys is different men. (Flynn, aged over 51, owner, construction and trade industry)

Even at a more abstract level, employers with a high belief in redeemability more readily identify desistance than those with lower redeemability beliefs. For example, Connor adopts a classical attribution (who the person is) approach to recognising desistance as a manifestation of the ex-offender's sense of morality. Connor's response below illustrates that the way an ex-offender might respond to a situation indicates where his or her morals lie. In turn, desistance is noticeable to the employer by the ex-offender's expression of his or her inherent character:

I mean you can work it [desistance] out just from, if we were having a conversation about...this is just generally speaking. But, say if there was an opportunity to do the wrong thing by someone so to speak, for their own gain, then they wouldn't, like they're

not interested in doing that sort of thing...but they made it pretty obvious that...like their morals are right, I guess. (Connor, aged 18-30, owner, retail and services industry)

Being attentive to transmitted desistance signals comprises only part of how desistance is recognised by employers. Interpreting signals as indicating desistance is also essential for effective desistance signalling. In 1976 Umberto Eco asserted that if signals are able to convey truths, they are also able to convey lies. Berger (2016:38) adopts this idea and applies it to the example of a “beautiful blonde woman...sitting at the bar who turns out to be neither blonde nor a woman, but a man, a transvestite who is lying with signs”. Things may not always be as they seem or are signalled and, without proper attention, misinterpretations can be made. In circumstances where signals are being relied upon to govern decisions or important assessments, attention to and interpretation of signals becomes a central consideration.

Accurate interpretations of desistance signals requires the signals associated with desistance and transmitted by the ex-offender to be understood by the employer as also meaning desistance. The results presented thus far in this results chapter, particularly in relation to signal fit, has adequately addressed what particular signals employers interpret as being meaningful of an ex-offender’s desistance. Not yet addressed is employers’ ability to interpret signals accurately or inaccurately. This is particularly important in circumstances where employers might misinterpret desistance signals to mean something other than desistance. However, signal interpretation may be improved via feedback, which constitutes the fourth and final element of the signalling timeline (Connelly et al., 2011), which I apply to my remaining analysis in the context of the desistance signalling environment. Whilst there are no explicit themes emerging from my interview data relating to interpretation, I argue that the coalescence of signal fit and feedback contribute to improved desistance signal interpretation.

Feedback. Within the desistance signalling environment, the accuracy of signal interpretation depends upon feedback which can either improve the accuracy of interpretation or greatly impede it. Feedback quality is improved through counter-signals. As defined in Chapter Two, counter-signals refer to a receiver’s response communicated back to the signaller to indicate how the signal has been interpreted at the outset and also to seek additional information from signallers. The quality of counter-signals thus either helps or hinders the interpretation of desistance signals. Applied to the context of hiring an ex-offender, counter-signalling enables employers to reduce information asymmetry, where assumptions or ambiguity about the ex-offender job applicant’s desistance are tested or clarified, respectively.

Pursuant to theories of communication, the interpretation of desistance signals occurs via a one-way or two-way transmission of information (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Morsing & Schultz, 2006). A one-way transmission constitutes information being sent by the signaller

and received by the employer without recourse to respond. Information indicating an ex-offender's desistance sent by third party signallers to employers is more likely to comprise a one-way transmission. This is by virtue of the fact that third party signallers generally communicate with employers via indirect means, such as a certificate of attainment or a reference. Even though, in some cases, a direct transmission may occur, where references are provided via a phone call, for example, opportunities for direct interaction between third party signallers and employers are limited and are therefore likely to be more susceptible to assumptions and lack of clarity about what the transmitted signals mean in relation to the ex-offender's desistance. Analysis of the interview data shows that without the opportunity to counter-signal by way of obtaining further information to substantiate the merits of third party signallers' assessments, employers are essentially left to rely on the judgements of others. The value of counter-signalling is also linked with assessments of the signaller's reliability, as demonstrated in William's quote, where a lack of clarity around the qualification of assessors and the rigor of assessments leaves employers with reservations about whether the ex-offender's desistance is genuine.

[...] it would be interesting to know who was doing the judging and what the criteria was [for a certificate of rehabilitation]...um...so yeah. It'd be helpful, it would definitely be something you'd take on board, but it'd be like everything, you'd take it with a grain of salt. (William, aged 41-50, business owner, retail and services industry)

A lack of confidence in Government-based third party signallers was also described as being associated with the inability to distinguish whether ex-offenders' desistance is legitimately assessed or as a result of finding loopholes and short cuts. Yet again, Maruna's (2014) sentiments about a lack of trust in assessments are echoed. Discussing the prospect of a certificate of rehabilitation, administered by a Government authority, having little recourse to verify the assessment rigor, Alica says:

[...] anything to do with the Government, there are a whole stack of different ways to rot the system and it becomes something you dis-trust out of hand, depending on how it's policed and administered. So in theory, it sounds good. (Alica, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

On the other hand, two-way transmission of information, which constitutes direct interaction between the signaller and receiver, enables both parties to establish the meaning of the communicated signal. Information received by the employer directly from the ex-offender in a two-way interaction facilitates the option for the employer to counter-signal and seek additional information to clarify that

the signals received are interpreted accurately as meaning desistance. By directly engaging with the ex-offender, employers' assessments about desistance are ultimately conducted autonomously, not through reliance upon the assessments or interpretation of others. Furthermore, two-way interactions need not involve dialogue for employers to interpret desistance. Earlier in the chapter, I outlined how observability (of facial expressions or general body language) was an important criteria for effective desistance signalling. Employers explained how dynamic interaction with the ex-offender lends itself to signals of desistance being visually observable. Similarly, two-way interaction and subsequent interpretation is best conducted via physical proximity between the employer and ex-offender by way of face-to-face encounters. In the following interview excerpt, Anna describes making initial judgments about ex-offenders' desistance via his or her non-verbal signals, then counter-signalling via verbal communication to test the accuracy of the initial judgment:

[...] you know how they present and project themselves, um...and to me I can see all of that without even having a conversation with somebody...um...the conversation then, if you get to that or when you get to that, can certainly give you an indication whether it's positive [i.e. an affirmative indication of change] or if it's a face. (Anna, aged 41-50, human resources, construction and trade industry)

Contributing further to feedback, exchanging dialogue enables the ex-offender to be actively involved in negotiating the meaning of information through interaction with the employer. This facilitates the opportunity for the ex-offender to provide context around the information provided, thereby minimizing the risk of misguided assumptions about whether or not the ex-offender is indeed a desister. Drawing on a personal experience of counter-signalling in the context of a two-way interaction with an ex-offender, Ryder describes how the opportunity to ask questions about the offending history and listen to the ex-offender's responses allowed him to gain a sense of what type of person the ex-offender had become since the time of his offending:

[...] in the case of the guy who came and said "I did get put in jail for assault, you know, twenty years ago"...I thought "well..." And I asked him what the circumstances were and he explained to me, I thought "you know, he seems like a fairly decent guy now, I'll give him a go". (Ryder, aged over 51, business owner, retail and services industry)

For other employers, counter-signalling through discussion and asking questions of the ex-offender, creates a scenario where ex-offenders are required to interact with the employer via responses and sharing of information. Layla's comments below indicate how the use of counter-

signalling encourages the ex-offender to continue signalling his or her desistance in a number of verbal and non-verbal ways:

You should be able to pick up on them, interacting, not stumbling, only too happy to give you as much information as possible and be very open in regards to any questions that you have, ask them about what they did, how they got into that situation...would you do it again? (Layla, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Counter-signalling highlights the point that effective desistance signalling is not the sole responsibility of the ex-offender, but employers have a role to play as well. Failure on the employer's behalf to actively engage in the process of desistance signal communication, could potentially lead to desistance signals being misinterpreted or left entirely unnoticed. For this reason, it may be of added benefit to ex-offenders in their desistance signalling endeavours to deliberately include strategies that encourage employers to actively engage in the signalling process.

Challenges to the efficacy of the desistance signalling environment. Commonly cited amongst communication scholars is the potential for information shared within the signalling environment that is irrelevant, untrustworthy or misleading to present as a barrier to signals being sent, received and interpreted accurately. Within communications literature, this is referred to as *distortion* or *noise* (Branzei et al. 2004; Carter, 2006; Connelly et al., 2011). The analysis of my interview data suggests distortion in the desistance signalling environment is especially problematic for a one-way desistance signal transmission. This is mostly due to the fact that, in many cases, employers are not able to counter-signal in order to clarify their understanding of the desistance signal, or ascertain the legitimacy of the third party's assessment as an indicator of the ex-offender's desistance.

Distortion in the desistance signalling environment occurs in a number of ways, creating a disturbance during transmission and reducing the clarity of desistance signals. For example, employers argue that the third party who is making determinations about whether the ex-offender has changed or not has an unrealistic view of him or her. This perception is driven by the assumption that third party assessments are conducted under synthetic conditions where the ex-offender is able to present favourably, rather than organic conditions where real-life circumstances are more likely to test whether the ex-offender has indeed desisted from crime or not. It is the synthetic assessment conditions that create distortion for employers, reducing their capacity to interpret third party signals as a clear transmission of the ex-offender's desistance, as Nicholas describes:

[...] you get a submission from a, you know, the case manager that this person's reformed, well they wouldn't have a clue...you know? They've got no idea, you know because they only see them in a controlled environment, whereas you know... they haven't put them back out to the real world where there's temptation, so how are they going to know whether they're reformed? They don't. They're only assuming... saying "oh yeah, he's been a good boy, or girl and they're never going to reoffend again". Well I'm sorry, that doesn't work for me, you know? (Nicholas, aged 41-50, director, retail and services industry)

An additional form of distortion in the desistance signalling environment described by employers is a mistrust in authorities to conduct believable assessments about an ex-offender's desistance. As illustrated in Flynn's response below, employers perceive that the legal system, which is in place to hold offender's to account, promotes too many options for offenders to avoid being held to account. In turn, this creates a barrier to trusting assessments about ex-offenders' desistance made by representatives within the legal system:

I think it's [certificate of rehabilitation] a crock of crap, personally because I think that if it was the same judge, if it was the same...But if they could convince the same beak that pulled down the time on them, to sign a rehabilitation order, I'd go "yeah, fair enough". I think you need that personal, I think you need that personal knowledge there, I really think that's important. I could see where it could happen, I can see where it would be good in that regard...but...there's just too much...um... there's too many lies in the legal profession, there's just too much overturning that and appealing that and.... oh... the policeman didn't smile properly when he read the rights so you're free to go. (Flynn, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry).

Identifying and interpreting desistance can also involve two-way interaction with third party signallers. Interacting with third party signallers, though, requires employers to trust the third party's interpretation of the ex-offender's desistance. Dewatripont and Tirole (2005) describe how a "lack of congruence" between the signaller and the receiver creates a barrier to effective transference of knowledge. In the context of this thesis, a lack of congruence manifests as employers viewing the interests of third party signallers as different from their own interests, thereby influencing the extent to which employers are willing to trust third party signallers. While this creates a challenge for employers to clearly interpret third party signals of desistance, it also has implications for employers' perceptions of the third party signallers' honesty and reliability as demonstrated earlier. Indeed, employers are hesitant about gauging ex-offenders' desistance on the basis of third party signals due

to an inability to know the precise motivations that govern the third party's choice of information provided. This creates a form of distortion for employers within the desistance signalling environment. Distortion in this context can be a consequence of third parties providing misleading signals or a failure to provide adequate information to substantiate signals that are representative of the ex-offender's desistance, as illustrated respectively in Lola and Hayden's comments that follow:

[...] maybe the employment agency might use tactics that kind of hide a little bit of the history to try and get them into a job. (Lola, aged 41-50, human resources, retail and services industry)

I will not do reference checks, because anyone in their right might when you give someone a name to do a reference check will not give you someone who's going to give you a bad reference. (Hayden, aged 41-50, administrator, construction and trade industry)

Encountering barriers or difficulties with receiving signals is indicative of distortion in the transmission of desistance signals. Desistance signal transmission between employers and ex-offenders becomes distorted if contradictory signals are being communicated. A failure to meet signaller reliability and signal consistency criteria contributes to a contradiction between signals being transmitted. When the ex-offender's behaviour does not line up with his or her claims about their desistance, this brings their reliability into question and creates a distraction for the receiver in being able to ascertain the ex-offender's likely desistance. Adding to this, when communicating desistance via a number of signals, it is critical to maintain signal consistency, otherwise employers receive mixed messages. In this regard, signal inconsistency creates distortion and presents challenges for employers to accurately interpret signals as being indicative of desistance, as illustrated in Jason's narrative below:

It would probably depend on what they had to say [about desisting from crime] and what they had to back up what they were saying. It's all well and good to do this, but your actions speak so loud that I just flat out can't hear what you're telling me...um...If I was interviewing somebody for a job, and they were telling me this sort of stuff, I would still be trying to piece together their story and paint a picture in my mind, is this person believable as opposed to...do I believe what they're telling me, as opposed to are they the right person for the job? Does that make sense? It's all well and good "Oh yeah I can do this and I can do that rah rah rah rah"...well hang on mate, in the last thirty minutes you've told me three things that contradict themselves, which one is it? (Jason, aged 41-50, business owner, construction and trade industry)

Signals transmitted directly between an ex-offender and employer also run the risk of being distorted when the information contained within the communicated desistance signal is incomplete. Partially concealing relevant details has implications for assessing the quality of the ex-offender's desistance signals and suggests to employers there may be ongoing problems. Anthony describes this as being an indication that the ex-offender has not learnt from their past mistakes, with the suspicion that change has not taken place remaining:

You've just got to ask the right questions to draw all that information out and if they've done silly things and they've learnt, most of them are happy to voice that and say "hey, I have done this, but...". Then there's others that... "yes I have, but you're not getting any information", sort of tells me that you're not comfortable, you haven't learnt from this...there's no full disclosure. (Anthony, aged over 51, business owner, construction and trade industry).

Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to examine the effects of desistance signals on the willingness of employers to hire job applicants with a criminal record. A further aim in this chapter has been to examine in greater depth what signals desistance, how these signals can be communicated to employers and how, in turn, they are received and interpreted by employers. There is strong support in the preliminary quantitative analyses for the feasibility of my proposed Willingness to Hire model. Having empirically established that employers' belief in redeemability is mediated by ex-offenders' signals of desistance (represented by hard and soft skills for this thesis), and vice versa, gives credence to the application of my proposed Willingness to Hire model to understand how employers formulate their willingness to hire an ex-offender. Under circumstances where employers with low redeemability beliefs are considering ex-offenders for employment, these results show that low beliefs are influenced by desistance signals and that an ex-offender's chances of securing employment may be improved. At the other end of the redeemability scale, the same effect amplifies high redeemability beliefs held by employers, further supporting favourable outcomes.

In accordance with my Willingness to Hire model, guiding my examination of these relationships, employers' willingness to hire is heavily influenced by the generalised beliefs they hold about the prospects of an offender's redeemability. In the absence of desistance signals, unless employers already maintain high beliefs about redeemability, ex-offenders continue to face poor employment outcomes. Desistance signalling is therefore critical for improving the willingness of employers to hire ex-offenders. Until now, the idea of desistance signalling has not been empirically examined in the context of ex-offender employment, and comprises a significant contribution made

in this . The results of my qualitative analysis contribute further to current literature by demonstrating how ex-offenders can signal change to prospective employers via strategic desistance signalling design.

As part of the desistance signalling environment, desistance signalling is made effective by meeting each of the criteria contained within the desistance signalling timeline. As a process of communication, the efficacy of desistance signalling depends on the quality of the four elements within the desistance signalling timeline - signaller, signal, receiver and feedback - as well as the ability to reduce distortion. In my analysis I have demonstrated that each of the criteria contained within the desistance signalling timeline matter to employers when assessing the suitability of an ex-offender for employment. These findings constitute a significant contribution to current criminological literature and lend themselves to innovative policy and practice implications, which I outline in my final chapter. In practice, the results of my analysis provide a guide by which ex-offenders are able to design a strategy to effectively signal desistance to prospective employers and be instrumental in improving their own employment outcomes.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

“Given a thimbleful of facts we rush to make generalizations as large as a tub ... Life is so short, and the demands upon us for practical adjustments so great, that we cannot let our ignorance detain us in our daily transactions”

Gordon Allport, 1954

Introduction

As gatekeepers to the workforce, employers occupy powerful positions by virtue of their hiring decisions, which ultimately determine an ex-offender's entry to or continued exclusion from employment. Employers are, however, hesitant to employ a job applicant with a criminal record (Pager & Quillian, 2005; Varghese, et al., 2010). Remaining unemployed positions ex-offenders at greater risk of reoffending since gaining employment is an important protective factor against further offending (Bahr et al., 2010). This is not because employment causes desistance per se, but because of the social supportive networks that exist through employment (Bushway & Apel, 2012). This renders employers important stakeholders for ex-offender employment outcomes, and, more broadly, reintegration into society.

Criminological scholarship has established that the barriers for ex-offenders to obtain employment are related to socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. race, gender, education, health status), vocational background (i.e. training, work experience), and the organisational context in which the ex-offender might be employed (i.e. industry size, location, type, employer's role) (Decker, 2014; Lukies et al., 2011; Pager & Western, 2009; Visser et al., 2011). In response to these barriers, steps taken to improve employment chances for ex-offenders typically encompass a range of services or programs aimed at addressing personal or vocational deficits (Lynch & Sabol, 2001; Solomon et al., 2004). However, it is not these deficits alone, but also having a criminal record that sets ex-offenders apart from any other prospective employees. In fact, employers cite their reluctance to hire ex-offenders because of their criminal record, and associated concerns about the safety and security of their business enterprise (Fahey et al., 2006; Lam & Harcourt, 2003; Snider & Reysen, 2014).

Although a lot of research has shown that criminal records matter to employers (Decker, 2014; Pager, 2003, 2007; Pager & Western, 2009), detailed investigation into how and why they matter has received less attention. Furthermore, the predictive factors for ex-offenders' employment examined to date are predominantly objective factors that are either fixed, such as the ex-offenders' race, gender or criminal record (Fahey et al., 2006; Decker, 2014; Pager, 2003, 2007; Pager & Western, 2009), or able to be addressed in some way but not necessarily unique to ex-offender job applicants, such as vocational training (Finn & Fontaine, 1983; Sabol, 2007; Visser et al., 2011). Even so, the continued

reluctance of employers to hire job applicants with a criminal record suggests there is more to the story.

For this reason, the aim of this thesis has been to examine why employers are either willing or unwilling to hire job applicants with a criminal record. To achieve this aim, I examined employers' perceptions about people who have offended and the influence of varying offence characteristics on employers' willingness to hire. I further examined employers' beliefs about the redeemability of offenders, and how desistance might be effectively signalled to employers within the context of their willingness to hire an ex-offender.

Beyond criminological modes of thinking, social psychological literature provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the relationships between offence characteristics, belief in redeemability, desistance signals and employers' willingness to hire. According to social psychologists, the decisions we make about others are motivated by our beliefs about them (Postmus et al., 2011). Not only that, but beliefs are not necessarily fixed and, under the right conditions, may be subject to change (Blair, 2002) unlike other objective factors such as a person's race or criminal record. For this reason, I argued that the next step in understanding the persistent reluctance amongst employers to hire ex-offenders is to contribute an employer-centric perspective to the current body of research which is currently heavily focussed on the socio-demographic characteristics, and vocational and educational deficits of ex-offenders.

This thesis makes such a contribution. To guide my analysis, I adopted the model of impression formation to assess, first, whether employers' stereotypical beliefs and their uptake of, or exposure to individuating information about ex-offenders (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982) was useful for explaining why a criminal record matters for employers' willingness to hire. Following this, I adapted the Impression Formation model and proposed an alternative Willingness to Hire model. In my proposed Willingness to Hire model I replaced stereotypes with employers' belief in redeemability (Maruna & King, 2009), and individuating information with ex-offenders' desistance signals (Bushway & Apel, 2012), to assess whether employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender can be explained by these subjective factors. Also featured in my examination was whether these subjective factors might be amenable to change and improve employers' willingness to hire. In my study I also retained an emphasis on ex-offenders' race since this is consistently reported in previous studies to influence employment outcomes for ex-offenders (Decker, 2014; Pager, 2003, 2007; Visser et al., 2011; Western, 2009). This was an important inclusion as the majority of these earlier studies demonstrating that race matters to employers are based in the U.S. with no comparable research conducted in Australia.

In order to conduct these assessments, my study followed an ESMM research design which unfolded across two phases and included three distinct points of integration (Ivankova et al., 2006). In the first phase, I conducted an online vignette study designed to quantitatively establish what relationships existed between offence characteristics, belief in redeemability, desistance signals, and willingness to hire. The results of my quantitative analysis informed the focus of my second phase face-to-face SSIs to examine in greater detail and provide further explanation about these relationships with added context. This accounted for the first point of integration. The second point of integration involved selecting a sub-sample of participants from the phase one survey for the phase two SSIs. The third point of integration appeared in the analysis and reporting of my results. I presented my integrated analyses across three thematic results chapters in direct alignment with the three question sets guiding this thesis. My study tested the relationships between a range of independent variables and employers' willingness to hire via the first phase quantitative study, then explained these relationships via the second phase qualitative study. The qualitative phase of this research enabled a deeper examination and explanation of the relationships that were found through the quantitative analyses, which provided insight into why employers are willing to hire some ex-offenders and not others. Consequently, the qualitative phase of this research was considered to take priority over the quantitative phase (quan → QUAL) on account of its weighting towards achieving the overall aims of this thesis.

In this final chapter I discuss the key findings transpiring from this thesis, along with the associated theoretical contributions to current knowledge. I extend the discussion on each of the key findings with my proposed implications for practice. My study does bear some limitations which I highlight towards the end of this chapter, along with recommendations for future research. I conclude this final chapter with some closing remarks about the overall merit of my thesis.

The Importance of Context for Breaking Down Negative Stereotypes by Connecting Employers with Ex-offenders: Understanding the “Whys” Over the “Whats” of a Job Applicant’s Criminal Record

A key finding in this thesis is that when employers are provided with information to help them understand why an ex-offender committed his or her crime(s), they are less likely to hold stigmatising attitudes towards ex-offenders and therefore be more open to hiring an ex-offender. Criminal records overwhelmingly attract negative stereotypes about the individual to whom the record belongs. The type and severity of the crime committed, the chronicity of offending, the type of sentence, and time related factors, as well as the compounding effect of race, have been well established in literature as significantly influencing employers' willingness to hire ex-offenders (Lukies et al., 2011; Pager, 2003; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager & Western, 2009; Varghese, et al., 2010). As a first step in broadening current theoretical knowledge, I adopted and applied the Impression Formation model

(Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982) to examine how and why a criminal record influences employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender. I also considered whether employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender can be explained by the two key components in the Impression Formation model—stereotypes and individuating information.

Consistent with the Impression Formation model (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Locksley et al., 1982), my findings provide compelling support for the proposition that negative stereotypes adversely influence employers' willingness to hire. By conducting hypothesis tests and MLR modelling, I found evidence demonstrating that an ex-offender's criminal record, offence characteristics and race—three factors that are consistently reported to be associated with negative stereotypes—are all associated with employers' reduced willingness to hire. In earlier literature, it is commonly reported that employers ascribe their hesitation to hire an ex-offender to the details of the applicant's criminal history, outside of the usual hiring considerations regarding skills, qualities, and the appropriateness of a job applicant for the position applied (Holzer et al., 2004; Snider & Reyson, 2014, Varghese, et al., 2010). My study extends this further by empirically establishing how employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender differs depending on offence type, offending chronicity, sentence type and time-lapse factors. Having multiple convictions affected the largest decrease on employers' willingness to hire and a time lapse of more than two years since the ex-offenders' most recent offence or completion of sentence affected a small increase on employers' willingness to hire.

Although my analysis showed employers' willingness to hire improved under the longer time lapse condition, the difference compared to less than two years was not as large as I had anticipated. Earlier studies suggest employers are more willing to hire an ex-offender if a period of offence free time has elapsed (Fahey et al., 2006; Holzer et al., 2004; Kurlychek et al., 2006), yet the appeal of time lapse factors to employers is not well understood. On the one hand, scholars have shown that greater lengths of crime-free time since offending suggest desistance from crime (Glueck & Glueck, 1974; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Moffitt, 1993). On the other hand, employers have previously articulated the manner in which time is spent as an important factor for their decision to hire an ex-offender. More specifically, having gained some work experience during the time between release from prison or most recent offence and applying for a job is favourable to employers (Fahey, et al., 2006:20). Any in depth analysis of this was not possible in my study since information on how the hypothetical ex-offender applicant spent his time during the two-year time lapse period was not included within my vignette. Nevertheless, in the absence of more detailed information, Dipboye (1994) argues that employers are open to formulating inaccurate assumptions about the prospective employee, in turn failing to address any uncertainties about his or her appointment, and thereby maintaining an unwillingness to hire.

These first results confirm the influence of stereotypes on employers' willingness to hire as proposed within the model. Without the second component of individuating information, employers' unwillingness to hire an ex-offender because of his or her offence characteristics limits the prospects for employers' hiring decisions to alter in a more favourable direction. My qualitative study provided further insight into the importance of individuating information to potentially improve employers' willingness to hire.

Foremost, the employers in my study expressed that without knowing the context around why an ex-offender engaged in crime, they make face-value assumptions about the ex-offender's risk of reoffending and suitability for employment, based on the offence characteristics contained within his or her record. Therefore, the context in which the offending occurred—such as an assault being provoked as opposed to an assault being a targeted attack—matters for employers' willingness to hire. These types of contextual details come to light as part of the individuating information component of the Impression Formation model. Employers in this study explained that having some detailed information to help make sense of why the offence(s) occurred serves as an indication of whether the ex-offender job applicant 1) offended by choice (classical attributions of crime); or 2) offended in response to external social circumstances (positivist attributions of crime) (Cullen et al., 1985); and therefore 3) is perceived as responsible for the offending behaviour to a greater or lesser extent.

Accordingly, if offending behaviour is perceived in light of positivist attributions, employers' generally report a tendency to apportion less blame to the ex-offender and to be more willing to hire, and vice versa as it relates to classical attributions. This tendency may be understood by Weiner's (1995) explanation that classical and positivist attributions are associated with attitudes about others' behaviour being within or beyond the scope of an individual's own control, respectively. Consequently, applying a classical attribution—i.e., that crime is a choice—amplifies stigmatising attitudes which lead to more retributive or punitive responses towards the individual on account of the individual making the rational, conscious choice to offend (Aquino, Tripp & Bies, 2001; Zwickert & Rieger, 2013). Conversely, attitudes of forgiveness and reconciliation are afforded those perceived as less blameworthy where social circumstances are seen to exert control over the ex-offender, provoking behaviour they may otherwise not have enacted (Aquino et al., 2001).

The employers in my study who make sense of offending in terms of attributional explanations tend to be less enthused about ex-offenders whom they perceive offended by choice, with expectations that the risk of re-offending is higher than those who offended because of circumstantial influences. Conversely, if circumstantial influences are perceived to be the cause of the ex-offender's crime, this leads to a greater sense of empathy for some employers and amenability to the idea of providing ex-offenders with a 'second chance'. This did not, however, occur homogenously in

relation to all offender types, with employers almost unanimously remaining steadfast in their refusal to hire sex offenders, and to a slightly lesser extent, those convicted of multiple offences. For these offender types, the process of impression formation may work to inhibit employers' willingness to hire, where stereotypical beliefs remain the primary influence, overshadowing any effect that individuating information could potentially have.

Apart from these offence characteristics that might reinforce employers' unwillingness to hire, being provided with detailed information explaining why the ex-offender's crimes were committed highlights aspects of the offence that may not be immediately obvious to employers. Yet, knowing about these aspects challenges what employers may stereotypically believe about ex-offenders' risk of re-offending. What my study shows and contributes to current knowledge is that individuating information in the form of contextual details has the potential to shift employers' perspectives about why the ex-offender job applicant offended and subsequently improve their willingness to hire. Put more simply, when employers are given more information, this might lead to different hiring decisions.

Conquering barriers to employment via meaningful connections.

With the potential to improve employers' willingness to hire by shifting perceptions about ex-offenders, in this section I argue in favour of increasing the opportunities to connect ex-offenders with employers. So far, my research accentuates the merit of individuating information relating to the context of offending as a way of moving employers beyond stereotypical assumptions about ex-offenders when forming impressions about their willingness to hire. A similar effect on perceptions about crime and offenders is reported to take place in restorative justice (RJ) conferences where individuating information is shared. As such, the approach that governs RJ conferencing resonates with the implications emerging from my thesis in terms of the importance of making connections between ex-offenders and employers.

The primary function of restorative justice conferencing is to bring together offenders and all parties affected by the offender's crime for the goal of working collaboratively towards repairing the harm caused. Aside from victims having the opportunity to voice the impact of the crime on their lives and to seek an apology (Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2001; O'Connell, Wachtel & Wachtel, 1999), one of the key components in the RJ process involves the offender explaining to the victim the context around why they committed their offence, as victims often seek to understand why they were the targeted victim (Shapland, et al., 2007; Strang, et al., 2006). The most notable parallel between RJ conferences and the Impression Formation model is that individuating (contextual) information is instrumental in altering the negative effect of offending behaviour on the victim, or comparably, employers' willingness to hire. For instance, evaluations of RJ conferencing report that by gaining a

contextual understanding of why the offence occurred and having the opportunity to draw conclusions about the offender's circumstances and character, victims report significantly reduced feelings of fear, anxiety and anger towards the offender; an improved sense of security; an ability to forgive; and an increased sense of empathy (Bonta, Wallace-Capretta, Rooney & McAnoy, 2002; Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005; Strang & Sherman, 2003). More widely reported, RJ processes increase victim satisfaction with coming to terms with their victimisation. These same outcomes are not reported for victims who participate in traditional justice processes (Latimer et al., 2005). In greater alignment with the focus of this thesis, RJ processes are reported to foster change and encourage desistance from crime (Claes & Shapland, 2016).

The outcomes reported in these RJ conference evaluations align with the findings in my thesis that individuating information about the context of an ex-offender's crime reduces employers' negative stigmatising attitudes, with the added positive effect on willingness to hire. There is hope, then, that the ex-offender's individuating information paints a different picture of their character and circumstances than what their criminal record might stereotypically suggest to employers. Since this is demonstrated to be the case as part of the outcomes of RJ conferencing, a similar approach should be adopted as far as bringing together employers and ex-offenders. In practical terms, this would require the strategic creation of opportunities for employers and ex-offenders to interact. From here, I depart from the discussion about RJ conferencing, but carry over the effective strategy of making connections between ex-offenders and employers for the practical implications that follow.

Government based strategies and action plans across most Australian States and Territories acknowledge that creating networks between employers and (ex-)offenders, especially those who are incarcerated, is central to improving employment prospects for those with a criminal record (Buchanan & Considine, 2007; Government of South Australia, 2016; QCS, 2008; 3P Consulting, 2011). In practice though, there appears to be very little priority given to the specific ways these networks might be created. The main emphasis on improving employment prospects for prisoners and offenders in the Australian context is on addressing educational and vocational deficits through training, with minimal attention to engaging employers. For instance, the Time to Work Employment Service 2018-2021 is one of the most recent Federal Government initiatives to help Indigenous prisoners secure work post-release (Department of Jobs and Small Business, 2018a). The purpose of this initiative is to engage employment service providers in all Australian States and Territories to provide in-prison employment service to incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The main focus of the service is to assess prisoners' employment barriers, assist in developing a transition plan; and facilitate the transfer between employment service providers from in-prison to post-release (Department of Jobs and Small Business, 2018b). However, any consideration about what employers want or attempts to facilitate the active involvement of employers directly, seems absent from this initiative.

Based on the findings of my research, I argue that there are two critical issues in the strategies that underpin these types of initiatives. The first relates to the emphasis on engaging employment service providers to assist ex-offenders into jobs. This may prove to be a problematic approach since the employers in my study did not express favourable attitudes towards third party involvement, unless strict criteria could be met, such as the employer personally knowing a reference provider, or assessments of ex-offenders being carried out rigorously. Of greater concern is the aversion to employment service providers that employers in my study expressed, due to perceptions these service providers do not act for the best interests of the employer, but their own self-serving agendas to meet placement quotas and receive commission. Therefore, it is quite possible that enlisting the assistance of employment service providers will be met with continued reluctance to hire from employers. For this reason, it would be a worthwhile exercise to consider restructuring the role of employment service providers from having a 'go-between' role to more of a mentor role by coaching offenders specifically in how to find a job.

The second issue to highlight here is the focus of current employment strategies being concentrated towards incarcerated offenders. I mentioned in Chapter One that ex-prisoners only make up a small minority of the total population of criminal record holders. Although it is demonstrated in this thesis that having spent time in prison lessens employers' willingness to hire, the primary stigmatising characteristic is having a criminal record, irrespective of whether a prison sentence was served or not. By concentrating efforts to assist prisoners into the workforce, rather than anyone with a criminal record, it is likely that the majority of the ex-offender population will miss out on receiving this kind of assistance.

For instance, in Queensland, where this current research is located, either CREST or MARA re-entry services are available in all prisons, except for Borallon Training and Correctional Centre. These two initiatives offered by Queensland Corrective Services are only available to prisoners and include post-release assistance with employment as part of the package of re-entry services offered (Queensland Government, 2018a). Again, the involvement of employers is not prioritised across these re-entry services. There are, however, a couple of exceptions where employers are actively involved. For example, as part of the focus on training and employment at the BTCC, external companies are able to conduct their business enterprise from within the correctional facility by employing prisoners. After release from prison, it is anticipated that prisoners will continue their employment with the employer on the outside (Queensland Government, 2015, 2016). Similar initiatives are also found in Western Australia's Prisoner Employment Program (Government of Western Australia, 2016), and the Northern Territory's Sentenced to a Job initiative (Northern Territory Government, 2018), with a recent evaluation showing that overall the Sentenced to a Job program has high participation rates and is regarded positively by employers (Wodak & Day, 2017).

To be clear, I am not arguing against the current initiatives in place that work towards connecting prisoners with employers; these should remain. I am, however, arguing for additional strategies to be developed to provide opportunities for the broader community-based ex-offender population to connect with employers in other ways. One example of how this can be achieved is through organised events such as job fairs for ex-offenders. Across the USA, there is an increasing prevalence of job fair events specifically organised to connect ex-offenders with employers. These events offer ex-offenders the opportunity to meet prospective employers, engage in and practice interview skills, distribute resumes, and for some, find employment. Mayo (2016) author of *From Jail to a Job*, identifies the advantages of job fairs in facilitating opportunities for ex-offenders to meet in person with prospective employers and make a good impression or, at least, break down negative stereotypes. Executive Director of the Law Enforcement Innovation Center, Don Green, has commented on the importance of these types of initiatives, stating that “helping those re-entering a ‘normal’ routine find an appropriate job that provides for basic needs is essential. Not just rent, transportation, food or clothes, but also self-esteem as to their worth” (Gienapp, 2017). Similar enterprises have also taken place across other parts of the U.S. (Arthur, 2017; Campbell, 2017; Graner, 2017; Madaus, 2017; WALB News, 2017).

Although there has been some recognition in Australian literature of the value of job fairs for challenging stigmatising attitudes towards ex-offenders (Graffam & Shinkfield, 2012a), there has been little uptake of these kinds of initiatives. I was able to find only one example in the Australian context and this was a job fair held within a women’s prison in South Australia (Eacott, 2017). Job fair initiatives are worth pursuing though, since prior evaluations show that participation has the potential to alter employers’ stereotypical beliefs about ex-offenders, made manifest by employers reporting overwhelming support for future participation, as well as a greater willingness to hire an ex-offender (McCollum, 2000; Moses, 1996). Neither Moses (1996) nor McCollum (2000) explicitly report why job fair participation positively affected employers’ attitudes towards hiring ex-offenders, however, this may be explained by the findings in my study that shows employers value interaction with ex-offenders as this enables individuating information about their offending behaviour to be made known, which is important for the impressions employers form about ex-offenders.

Hope on the Horizon for Addressing Low Redeemability Beliefs: The Promise of Anti-stigma Campaigns to Improve Employers’ Belief in Redeemability

A further key finding in this thesis is that employers’ beliefs about the redeemability of offenders matters for employers’ willingness to hire. Needing particular attention are employers with low redeemability beliefs who express pessimistic attitudes about the probability that offenders can change and desist from crime, and therefore remain less willing to hire. This finding provides compelling evidence for the first component in my Willingness to Hire model, where stereotypes are

replaced by belief in redeemability and are instrumental for improving employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender.

Early in this thesis I argued that Maruna and King's (2009) belief in redeemability can be likened to stereotypes since they refer to generalised beliefs about similarly categorised individuals (i.e. offenders) and the behavioural expectations associated with those beliefs (i.e. capacity to change or not). I therefore proposed that redeemability beliefs would influence employers' willingness to hire in a similar way that stereotypes are influential in the process of impression formation. Prior to my research, belief in redeemability (or change) has been shown to be significantly associated with punitive attitudes (see for example Leverentz, 2011; Maruna & King, 2009), but has not been applied within a specific context in terms of whether and how redeemability beliefs may or may not influence a particular decision-based outcome.

My study addressed this gap by assessing the influence of redeemability beliefs held by employers on their willingness to hire an ex-offender. This part of my research focus was inspired by social psychological literature which asserts that our (stereotypical) beliefs held about others guides the decisions we make about them (Kunda & Sherman-Williams, 1993). Using MLR modelling, the findings in my study show that, over and above all other factors, higher belief in redeemability scores are associated with higher chances that employers are willing to hire. In addition, my study supports the claims other scholars have made that, under the right condition(s), beliefs are malleable (Blair, 2002; Quillian & Pager, 2010). In this thesis, redeemability beliefs may alter when ex-offenders effectively signal their desistance from crime and/or employers have had a positive experience hiring an ex-offender in the past. This means that employers rating low on the belief in redeemability continuum do not have to remain that way. This is promising for job applicants with a criminal record who may encounter an employer with low redeemability beliefs, although there are some exceptions. In relation to sex offenders and also chronic multiple offenders, employers' unwillingness to hire is grounded in deep-seated moral positions and the fundamental beliefs held about such offenders perceived as morally abhorrent remain stable and may not be as amenable to change (Haidt, 2008). Nevertheless, this new insight, that redeemability beliefs matter is an important contribution to current theoretical knowledge since many factors previously shown to be a barrier for ex-offenders' entry into the workforce are static and not amenable to change – such as the characteristics featured within their criminal record (Holzer et al., 2004; Snider & Reyson, 2014, Varghese, et al., 2010). In a practical sense though, one cannot know where a prospective future employer sits on the belief in redeemability continuum, which constitutes a key consideration to be made when determining ways to improve employers' belief in redeemability and ultimately, their willingness to hire.

Thinking strategically, a concerted focus on challenging lower redeemability beliefs is paramount, since employers with higher beliefs are already more likely to hire. Knowing how to

challenge lower redeemability beliefs, however, requires some insight into why some employers hold little hope for offenders to change and desist from crime. My thesis clearly demonstrates a collective agreement among employers about the possibility of change, but also shows the primary feature distinguishing employers with lower beliefs from those with higher beliefs is pessimistic attitudes about the *probability* of ex-offenders changing. Although this may seem intuitive, having established this through my analysis provides the empirical basis upon which strategies to address underlying pessimistic attitudes might be built.

On account of the parallels I have drawn between stereotypes and belief in redeemability for this thesis, I look to the literature concerning stereotype amplification and attenuation, described in Chapter Two, as an important theoretical basis to argue that redeemability beliefs may also be amplified or attenuated. In terms of practical implications, the focus for any strategy targeting redeemability beliefs should emphasise an ex-offender's redeemability to attenuate lower redeemability beliefs, which at the same time would also amplify higher redeemability beliefs. To accomplish this, I draw from strategies currently in place to address negative stereotypes about mental illness through campaigns designed to challenge stigmatising attitudes.

Targeting low redeemability beliefs through anti-stigma campaigns.

'Anti-stigma Campaigns' is the name given to strategies aimed at challenging negative public perceptions about stigmatised individuals, such as those with a criminal record, with the primary goal of improving their social inclusion. Anti-stigma campaigns are currently in use to address the stigmatisation and associated social exclusion of those who suffer mental illness, and have been adopted in a number of Western countries such as the USA, Canada, England, Denmark, New Zealand, Switzerland, Wales, Ireland, Sweden, Spain, The Netherlands, and Australia (Corrigan & Shapiro, 2010; Time to Change, 2018). I propose that a similar anti-stigma type strategy might be a useful way to attenuate stigmatising attitudes about ex-offenders, amongst employers at the broader collective level.

Some strategies currently in place that bring ex-offenders and employers together, such as the job fairs I mentioned earlier or including employers as active participants in prisoner employment programs, are shown to inadvertently reduce employers' stigma towards ex-offenders (McCollum, 2000; Moses, 1996). Outside of these initiatives, concerted efforts to specifically address stigma and reintegrate ex-offenders as a population-level intervention is absent from both literature and practice. This may be due to the main emphasis in reintegration endeavours being offender-centric and not society-centric, where the focus of employment assistance is placed on addressing social, educational and vocational deficits that are known to create barriers for reintegration among offender populations. Any strategic effort to address beliefs and stigmatising attitudes held by employers about ex-

offenders, which is shown in my thesis to be an additional barrier for ex-offenders' employment, is at best, minimal.

There are widespread attempts in the USA to re-shift employers' focus away from ex-offenders' criminal records through campaigns such as 'ban the box', which aims to remove questions about prior criminal history from job application forms (Rodriguez & Avery, 2016). Nevertheless, the primary focus of ban the box-style campaigns is centred more on policy changes rather than attitude changes. In effect these may at best facilitate hiring decisions to be made on the basis of individual merit, but at worst only delay the activation of stigmatising attitudes if disclosure of a criminal record takes place at a later stage in the application process. It is possible that legislative and policy changes will be of some benefit in terms of employment outcomes for ex-offenders, however, none of these changes adequately target the prevailing beliefs employers hold about job applicants with a criminal record.

Instead, to effectively address employers' low redeemability beliefs about offenders, a strategic approach to researching the underlying (mis)perceptions that drive stigmatising attitudes, shown in this thesis to be pessimism about the capacity for offenders to change, should take place as part of the anti-stigma campaign design (Vaughan & Hanson, 2004). Evidence-based approaches to counter these attitudes can then be developed and implemented. This type of approach proved to be successful in reducing stigmatising attitudes about mental illness through 'Like Minds, Like Mine', an ongoing National anti-stigma campaign in New Zealand since 1996, with the most recent national plan in place for 2014-2019 (Ministry of Health and Promotion Agency, 2014). The Australian equivalent of Like Minds, Like Mine, is SANE Australia (sane.org), which also aims to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness through education. It was only in 2015, however, that SANE Australia urged the Federal Government to instigate a five-year national plan to reduce the stigma aimed at those with a mental illness and this is yet to be seen (SANE Australia, 2015). For the discussion that follows, I draw on the strategies of Like Minds, Like Mine given the further advancement of this strategy.

Using media advertising and public education strategies, the objective of Like Minds, Like Mine is to engage the public at the grassroots level and attenuate stereotypical beliefs about, as well as change behaviour towards, those who suffer with mental illness. For maximum impact, the campaign is designed to target specific groups with greater exposure to people with a mental illness, such as education and housing providers, health professionals, and the police. Like Minds, Like Mine campaign evaluations report that the stigma reducing strategies used are effective in attenuating negative perceptions about mental illness amongst the general public, which is also of benefit to those who suffer with mental illness (Arboleda-Flórez & Sartorius, 2008; Blanchard, Weigel, & Cook, 1975; Corrigan, 2005; Corrigan, Markowitz, Watson, Rowan & Kubiak, 2003; Weiner, 1995).

The approach and reported success of *Like Minds, Like Mine* provides a worthwhile strategy for educating employers about the capacity for ex-offenders to desist from crime, as well as their value as an employee. In practical terms, the personal stories of stigmatised individuals are noted by Vaughan and Hansen (2004) as being a powerful tool for reducing stigma. This is demonstrated by reports from service providers that hearing the personal testimonies of people diagnosed with a mental illness had the most profound impact on reducing stigma (Pinfold, Thornicroft, Huxley & Farmer, 2005; see also Wood & Wahl, 2006). The equivalent of this concerning ex-offenders is their ‘redemption script’, a personal narrative that encapsulates the key agentic elements contributing to their own desistance from crime (Maruna, 2001). Reflected in the findings in Chapter Five, the employers in my study also described ex-offenders’ agency as crucial for desistance in that change depends on the choice and action taken by the ex-offender towards change. This being the case, efforts to attenuate lower redeemability beliefs and challenge pessimistic attitudes should also seriously consider the active involvement of ex-offenders in recounting personal stories of change and desistance from crime.

Also, similar to *Like Minds, Like Mine*, the effectiveness of anti-stigma campaigns designed to attenuate employers’ low redeemability beliefs should involve individuals with whom employers can relate to as either “ordinary”, or likely to hold in high regard (Thornicroft, Wyllie, Thornicroft & Mehta, 2014). For instance, Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, wrote to the Financial Times regarding his own experience of hiring ex-offenders. He stated that in prison can be found “a large number of potential superstars who get ignored by employers because of their criminal record. It makes sense for UK companies to recruit these individuals and to make use of their skills and enthusiasm” (James, 2016b, para. 2). Another large UK based company, The Timpson Foundation, reports that about four hundred ex-offenders are employed with the company, accounting for about ten percent of its total workforce. Upon reflection, Chief Executive James Timpson recalls that out of a total of more than 750 ex-offenders employed by the company, only seven (to their knowledge) had reoffended (James, 2016b). Capitalising on these types of endorsements has also been recommended in a report by Baldry and colleagues (2018) by way of engaging employers who have had positive experiences to share those experiences and promote the value of hiring ex-offenders. Personal accounts like these do not align with the expectations employers hold about people with a criminal record being highly likely to reoffend. Using well known figures and their stories may therefore serve to challenge the underlying pessimistic attitudes that drive lower beliefs about the capacity for offenders to change.

These personal accounts are a far cry from the media headlines that paint a much more dismal picture. Counter evidence provided by stories like Branson’s and Timpson’s offer an alternative perspective for employers to contemplate the merits of hiring ex-offenders. As such, it is not unreasonable to level some blame at the media for fostering pessimistic attitudes about the prospects

for offenders to change. Research has indeed shown that a high proportion of the public rely on television and print media to inform their opinions about crime (Duffy et al., 2008; Garvey, 2003). This being the case, news headlines such as “Prisoner reoffending rates on the rise” printed in *The West Australian* (2018) does nothing to promote accurate public perceptions about rates of reoffending among the total population of criminal record holders, a problem I highlighted in the introduction of this thesis. Nevertheless, messages such as this promoted through the media will align with expectations held by employers with lower redeemability beliefs that criminality is set in stone and desistance from crime for those with a criminal record is not probable. In response to studies that show public perceptions about crime are predominantly informed by the media, Davis and Dosseter (2010) conclude that the media plays a key role in forming perceptions about crime trends in Australia. If this is the case, this can be extended to the media also playing a key role in promoting alternative perceptions by way of anti-stigma campaigns.

The Blueprint for Desistance Signalling: A Strategy for Effectively Signalling Desistance from Crime

As well as redeemability beliefs, desistance signalling also matters for employers’ willingness to hire an ex-offender. Desistance signals constitute the second component of my adapted Willingness to Hire model. As it stands in social psychological literature, individuating information is described in broad theoretical terms as personal attributes about an individual that potentially alter what is stereotypically believed about them, leading to a different impression formed about them. I adopted desistance signals as a particular type of individuating information about an ex-offender and added this to my Willingness to Hire model to demonstrate that desistance signals, in conjunction with belief in redeemability, alter employers’ willingness to hire in a favourable direction. This is reassuring for ex-offenders and an important contribution to literature since employers’ hiring processes consider individuals for employment, not groups.

In criminological literature, desistance signalling is drawn from Spence’s (1973) job market signalling ideas found in labour economics literature, which refers to the way job applicants rely on a range of hard and soft skills to signal their value as an employee to prospective employers. Adapted to the context where ex-offenders are seeking employment, desistance signalling refers to the way ex-offenders also rely on a range of hard and soft skills to signal to prospective employers that they are no longer engaged in offending behaviour. Prior to my study, desistance signalling was put forward as a theoretical proposition but had not been empirically examined within the specific context of employers’ willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record (Bushway & Apel, 2012). My study addressed this gap and provides empirical evidence to support Bushway and Apel’s (2012) proposition that desistance signals are instrumental for improving employers’ willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record.

Since desistance signals matter for employers' willingness to hire (after adjusting for other factors), I extended this important theoretical contribution in my quantitative analysis to show that both hard and soft skills independently influence employers' willingness to hire. Using more complex mediation analysis, my findings show that soft skills explain the relationship between hard skills and employers' willingness to hire, suggesting that hard skills play an instrumental role in making soft skills obvious, rather than hard skills having any particularly inherent value for signalling desistance to employers. This is critical to current understanding as it informs the way hard and soft skills should be used by ex-offenders in signalling their desistance to prospective employers, which I examined in greater detail in my qualitative analysis by adopting Connelly et al.'s (2011) signalling timeline to assess its applicability to signalling desistance.

My qualitative analysis provides strong support for the application of the signalling timeline to the context of desistance signalling. As such, I adapted Connelly et al.'s (2011) timeline to create the desistance signalling timeline and provided empirical evidence demonstrating how desistance can be effectively signalled to employers. This is a major contribution to criminological literature since Connelly et al.'s (2011) model refers to the general process of signalling messages, whereas my adapted desistance signalling timeline sets out the requirements to specifically signal desistance within the particular context of communication between ex-offenders (or third parties) and employers. The desistance signalling timeline provides a practical framework by which an ex-offender's desistance might be communicated to employers in strategic ways. This may also be applied to signal desistance to other key stakeholders who make decisions about ex-offenders in the reintegration process, such as housing providers, health services or education officers. The merit in adapting this signalling timeline is that it provides a blueprint to plan and maximise the efficacy of desistance signalling. This is particularly useful for addressing the criteria for each element within the desistance signalling timeline, as well as who should be involved in transmitting signals to employers to maximise desistance signalling efficacy.

Of particular note is the argument I have made that third parties who signal on behalf of ex-offenders are potentially problematic when a third party's account of the ex-offender is not a clear signal of desistance, thereby creating a distorted message about whether or not the ex-offender is indeed a desister. This third party problem is worthy of attention in the Australian context since, as I have outlined earlier in this chapter, there is a heavy reliance on employer service providers to assist prisoners and offenders into work. Gauging a prospective ex-offender's qualities such as honesty, motivation, and attitude, whilst also getting a sense of the person, is difficult to ascertain via the testimony of a third party. In other contexts, third party communication sources have been reported as less reliable due to the Chinese whisper effect producing inaccuracies in the information being relayed from one person to the next (Bost, Crilly, Patterson & Chaboyer, 2012; Owen, Hemmings & Brown, 2009).

This further confirms the imperative for ex-offenders to signal their own desistance and, as such, should receive prioritised consideration when formulating any desistance signalling strategies. To accomplish this, ex-offenders need to be educated in how to signal their desistance from crime in ways that meet the criteria for efficacy as denoted in the desistance signalling timeline. Efforts to educate ex-offenders in signalling desistance should also accommodate additional considerations as it relates to offenders with intellectual disabilities (Vanny, Levy & Hayes, 2008) and mental illness (Baldry, 2014) given their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Furthermore, cultural considerations should also be factored into desistance signalling education for Indigenous ex-offenders due to the different cultural expectations around communication. For example, as mentioned in Chapter Two, the custom for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is to avoid eye contact as a sign of respect (Queensland Health, 2015), whereas in Western cultures, and reinforced by employers in my study, eye contact is a sign of honesty. In the following section, I discuss the practical implications arising from my thesis and propose effective desistance signalling can be achieved by strategic design.

Desistance signalling by strategic design.

Designing desistance signalling strategies is the final major contribution to the practical implications emerging from my thesis. The idea of strategically designing desistance signals is innovative and provides ex-offenders with a tactic to deliberately and clearly communicate to employers that they are no longer engaged in offending behaviour. Much of the literature around signal design is located within the biological sciences and particularly in relation to animal communication and sexual selection (see for example Espmark, Amundsen & Rosenqvist, 2000), with some reference to signal design in business and marketing literature (Dunham, 2011; Prabhu & Stewart, 2001). Donath (2011) however, draws an important distinction between human and animal signalling behaviours, arguing that only humans design their own communication systems. For the purposes of explaining the desistance signalling design implications relating to the context of my thesis, I make reference to signal design in marketing literature.

According to Taj (2016) signal design begins with the end in mind, centring on two key considerations: 1) the target market; and 2) the primary goal for signalling. Designing signals then incorporates these considerations into developing practical strategies for effective signalling to take place. To illustrate, I adopt Taj's (2016) ideas and apply them directly to the case of ex-offenders signalling desistance by design. The target market in this instance is employers and the primary goal for desistance signalling is to demonstrate to employers that the ex-offender job applicant is a 'safe bet' to hire. Bearing in mind that my study shows employers envisage some challenges in the context of considering an ex-offender for employment, strategies that address these challenges should also be factored into desistance signalling designs. These challenges relate to third party signallers,

anticipated risks posed by ex-offenders, and noise within the signalling environment. Accordingly, desistance signal designs should also aim to mitigate these challenges in addition to effectively signalling the ex-offender's desistance from crime.

Although employers raise a range of uncertainties about the legitimacy of third-party signallers, the reasons underpinning their uncertainties are very clear and can be addressed in the context of desistance signal designs. For instance, employers prefer to obtain references from either a known or credible source. Even though an ex-offender job applicant cannot know who an employer does or does not know, here the option would be to connect the prospective employer with a past employer who has a good reputation or other respected community member, providing they meet the signaller criteria of honesty and reliability as set out in the desistance signalling timeline.

Less well received as third-party signallers are employment agencies. Perhaps the focus on how employment agencies serve the needs of ex-offenders could be shifted from playing a frontline advocacy-type role on behalf of ex-offenders to more of a backseat role as job coaches by training ex-offenders to front their own job seeking endeavours. Job coaching is a strategy that has featured in other contexts to help people with disabilities build work and social skills in order to better assimilate with the work culture (Müller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, 2003; Westerlund, Granucci, Gamache & Clark, 2006). As job coaches, employment agency personnel might be of more use in assisting ex-offenders to design their desistance signalling strategies and coach ex-offenders in the transmission of signals to be recognisable to employers. As for third parties that assess and provide accreditations of any kind for ex-offenders, evidence of how these accreditations meet the criteria for what makes a valuable signal according to those set out in the timeline, should also be factored into the desistance signalling design.

As far as concerns about risks, as well as noise within the signalling environment, these can both be alleviated in conjunction with one of the earlier research implications I outlined in this chapter by creating opportunities for ex-offenders and employers to interact. Employers' concerns about risks tend to be associated with offence characteristics (such as a conviction for violence). Without having access to any of the contextual information to formulate attributional explanations of the offending behaviour, assumptions about dangerousness are likely to be made about ex-offenders. This also creates noise in the desistance signalling environment and distorts the possibility for employers to recognise desistance signals or impedes the opportunity to seek clarification via counter-signalling. In fact, assumptions about dangerousness or noisy signalling environments generally come about because of information asymmetry and a lack of clarity about what is or is not known. In designing desistance signalling strategies, ex-offenders should seek or create their own opportunities to interact directly with employers in order to lessen these challenges that could prove detrimental to effective desistance signalling. Some additional attention to educating ex-offenders in how this could be achieved might

be in order for those with intellectual disabilities and mental illness, or to incorporate cultural considerations as raised above.

Paying particular attention to magnifying what appeals to employers, whilst also mitigating the challenges, is important for designing signals to achieve the primary goal of assuring employers that the ex-offender job applicant being considered is a worthwhile candidate. By knowing what employers value and recognise as signalling desistance is of great advantage to ex-offenders. It means that job applicants who have a criminal record do not have to rely on the hope that an employer will recognise their desistance. Instead, ex-offender job applicants are able to take the necessary steps to communicate their desistance, ensuring the criteria contained within the desistance signalling timeline are met in order to maximise the efficacy of desistance signalling efforts.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

In this thesis I make important theoretical contributions to current criminological knowledge as it concerns employers' subjectivity influencing their willingness to hire an ex-offender. My aim was to examine why a criminal record matters to employers for ex-offenders seeking entry into the workforce. By way of an innovative mixed methods research design, my thesis establishes that race, offence characteristics, belief in redeemability and desistance signalling all differentially alter the chances an employer is willing to hire an ex-offender. I find support for my Willingness to Hire model which proposes that belief in redeemability, together with desistance signals, influence employers' willingness to hire an ex-offender. A mixed methods research design also enabled me to formulate a more detailed understanding about redeemability beliefs being framed in terms of possibilities, probabilities and pessimistic attitudes differentiating employers rating low in beliefs from those rating high. As well, I was able to find support for my adapted desistance signalling timeline to govern how desistance might be signalled in ways that are both recognisable and valuable to employers. I do acknowledge, though, that this thesis is not without its limits.

First, an empirical assessment of whether and how offending context influences the chances an employer is willing to hire was not possible as measures of crime attributions were not included in my survey. Yet these themes featured strongly in my analysis of the interview data, suggesting an employer may or may not be willing to hire depending on whether an ex-offender is perceived to have offended due to making the rational decision to do so (classical attribution), or because of external social pressures (positivist attribution) (Cullen et al., 1985). Earlier research shows that crime attributions do contribute to explanations of, for example, public punitive attitudes (Maruna & King, 2009), political affiliation and punitiveness (Jacobs & Carmichael, 2002), support for harsh or alternative sentencing (Roberts & Stalans, 2004), and differential support for the death penalty depending on race (Peffley & Hurwitz, 2007). Determining the underlying cause of crime in

accordance with attributions leads to presumptions about the offender's blameworthiness, with offender's perceived as choosing to offend viewed as the most blameworthy and therefore deserving of harsh punishment. In contrast, those perceived as offending due to external pressures are seen as less blameworthy and therefore more deserving of grace (Finkel, 2000; Roberts & Stalans, 2004). The employers in my study allude to the fact that attributional explanations are important for determining their willingness to hire, but also that attributions can be applied differentially depending on offence characteristics and offending context. These findings point to recommendations for further research to assess first, the association between attributional explanations applied to different offence characteristics and employers' willingness to hire; then whether additional information about the offending context adjusts these applied attributions and associations in one way or another. It would be expected that if attributional explanations influence willingness to hire, but are also subject to alter, this would have further implications for whether and how employers perceive ex-offenders as deserving of a job. This brings me to the second limit in this study as it relates to beliefs about redemption.

Part of the aim in this thesis was to examine whether belief in redeemability matters for employers' willingness to hire and indeed I found strong evidence in support of redeemability beliefs predicting the chances that an employer will hire. What was not explicitly examined though was whether employers believe in the notion of redemption, despite what they believe about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime. The notion of redemption is steeped in religious rhetoric that refers to the forgiveness of sins, made evident by living a productive life through the opportunities to do so (Blumstein & Nakamura, 2009). The opportunities to be redeemed presents as a 'second chance' to live life differently (Maruna, Wilson & Curran, 2006). Whether ex-offenders deserved a second chance or not was raised by some employers in my study, although this was not explored to any great extent. Subscribing favourably to the idea that ex-offenders should be given the opportunity to be redeemed is not an alternative view to holding strong punitive views (Cullen, Fisher & Applegate, 2000). Public opinion research shows that even the most punitive members of the public, also express, to a greater extent, favourable attitudes towards rehabilitation and forgiveness (Cullen, Cullen & Wozniak, 1988; Applegate, Cullen, Fisher & Vanderven, 2000). However, believing that ex-offenders should be redeemed does not necessarily translate to a willingness to facilitate the opportunity for redemption. For example, Brown (1999) demonstrates the NIMBY (not in my backyard) syndrome in this respect, showing positive public support towards the treatment of sex offenders, which is then significantly reduced at the prospect of a sex offender treatment centre being located in the local community. Based on the limitations of my study outlined here and other possibilities that might influence employers' willingness to hire, future research should consider the intersection between employers' redeemability beliefs, their perspectives on the deservingness of

offenders to be redeemed by way of a ‘second chance’, and whether employers would be prepared to offer such second chances.

Third, my thesis has established a new theoretical understanding as it relates to signalling desistance to employers by way of effective communication strategies. These findings contribute a first step to addressing the concern raised by Bloom (2012) about the potential for desistance signals to be weak and the need to identify ways to improve their efficacy. My thesis finds support for addressing the criteria within the desistance signalling timeline to improve the efficacy of desistance signals, which I have argued can be achieved by strategic design. The scope of this research did not enable me to test whether designing desistance signalling strategies in accordance with the criteria contained within the timeline makes for efficacious signalling of desistance to employers. Uptake in future research of this theoretical implication from my thesis should first comprise an experimental design study in order to evaluate the effectiveness of desistance signalling design on influencing employers’ willingness to hire ex-offenders. Within the scope of such evaluations, it would also be advantageous to determine what particular uncertainties intensify employers’ pessimistic attitudes about the probability that offenders can change and desist from crime and whether these uncertainties can be specifically addressed via desistance signal design.

Finally, there are a couple of methodological limits in this thesis worth acknowledging. The first is regarding this study being constrained to employers within one specified Australian location, Toowoomba, which means that the findings are not necessarily generalisable to the broader population outside of the research site. Although I confirmed the representativeness of Toowoomba in relation to Queensland on the basis of socio-structural demographics, this representativeness may not also hold for public attitudes towards ex-offenders and willingness to hire. I base this supposition on the premise that Forrest and Dunn’s (2006) study confirms the geographical distribution of racist and intolerant attitudes across Queensland and New South Wales by location. Furthermore, I draw on the State election results of 2017, which shows that over 40 percent of Toowoomba’s voting population voted for the Liberal National Party whereas the Australian Labour Party dominated the polls at the State level (Electoral Commission Queensland, 2017). Based on these examples showing a disparate distribution of public attitudes and political affiliation, it is reasonable to expect some disparity in the distribution of redeemability beliefs and associated willingness to hire. Thus, it is recommended that future research accounts for the geographical distribution of employers’ attitudes about hiring ex-offenders by broadening the geographical scope in the research design and sampling strategy to enable greater generalisability of the findings.

The second methodological limitation in this thesis relates to the context in which employers work. I purposively selected and then aggregated my sample into two strata—construction and trade, and retail and services—based on the premise that ex-offenders typically have low levels of education

and poor work histories and are therefore likely to find employment in entry-level type jobs. Whilst my quantitative analysis did not show industry strata to be significantly associated with the chance an employer is willing to hire, there was some indication emerging from the interview data that the considerations employers made with regard to hiring an ex-offender may differ according to industry sector. Whilst the possibility has been flagged in my earlier analysis that employers' willingness to hire may differ by industry, the jury is still out and this prospect needs further examination. The limits to examining whether industry matters or differs for employers' willingness to hire in my thesis may be attributable to a couple of reasons. First, my sample was aggregated into two strata which may have been too broad to distinguish differences. Second, the industry types selected for my thesis include only those that would accommodate employment opportunities not requiring any formal qualifications or extensive work experience and thus are appropriate for the majority of ex-offenders looking to enter the workforce. However, not all ex-offenders are deficient in education or work experience. By the same token, it is not unreasonable to expect that over time ex-offenders may gain qualifications and seek work in professional industries. For these reasons, it is recommended that future research endeavours should be designed to incorporate a broader scope of industries.

Concluding Comments

Much of the research around employment outcomes for ex-offenders is offender-focussed, emphasising personal attributes about ex-offenders and their criminal history being the driving force behind employers' reluctance to hire. Very little, if any, research has also considered the process by which employers make their decisions about ex-offender job applicants and what influences the outcome of those processes. If this remains absent from initiatives designed to help ex-offenders into the workforce, then we may have already witnessed the best it is going to get, with very little further impact on shifting the reluctance of employers to hire ex-offenders in a more favourable direction.

Arguably, employers occupy the most powerful position in the broader scheme of job opportunities for ex-offenders on account of such opportunities entirely depending upon employers' willingness to hire. For this reason, my thesis has made a critical contribution to current knowledge by establishing that what employers believe about the capacity for offenders to change and desist from crime, as well as how employers recognise desistance, matters for their willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record.

At the outset of this thesis I noted the one distinguishing feature that differentiates ex-offenders from non-offenders is their criminal record and the details contained within the criminal record are unchangeable. By virtue of this fact, it would seem reasonable to expect employers' willingness to hire would also remain relatively stable. My thesis demonstrates that this is not the case. Instead, under the right conditions, the beliefs employers hold about ex-offenders' redeemability and how ex-

offenders can signal their desistance is dynamic and can be altered in ways that improve employers' willingness to hire even in the company of an unchangeable criminal record. This is a particularly promising outcome of this thesis. It highlights the importance for any endeavour aimed at improving employment outcomes for ex-offenders to emphasise initiatives that improve employers' belief in redeemability and to aid ex-offenders in designing effective desistance signalling strategies, since these two factors are unique to ex-offender populations.

On a broader scale, this thesis shows that employment, a central requirement to improve reintegration success for ex-offenders, requires active involvement from all who have a stake in improving the chances of reintegration success. Ex-offenders cannot be held solely responsible for obtaining work since employment opportunities also depend on employers to provide ex-offenders the chance to work. Therefore, employment for ex-offenders and, more broadly, reintegration is a two-way street and should be promoted as such.

In the title of Maruna and King's (2009) article, the question is posed "Once a criminal always a criminal?" From a retrospective viewpoint, employers considering an ex-offender job applicant might argue 'yes'. However, the message to employers needs to be clearer that employment is a crucial element for reducing the chances of reoffending and that past offending behaviour is not an accurate indicator of what can be expected for the future work performance of a job applicant with a criminal record. With the strategic use of anti-stigma campaigns, the creation of opportunities to connect employers with ex-offenders, and by way of innovative desistance signal designs, employers' beliefs about the redeemability of offenders may well improve, along with their willingness to hire. Above all, employers are uniquely positioned to be active contributors towards the reduction of reoffending among ex-offender populations by providing opportunities to work. Whether or not employers are willing to actively engage in the reintegration of ex-offenders in this way is the deciding factor that determines whether employers will remain part of the problem or part of the solution for the successful reintegration of ex-offenders.

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Appendix 1



School of Social Science
Anthropology, Archaeology, Criminology & Sociology

Dr Patricia Short
Acting Head of School

28 November, 2014

Suzanne Reich
C/- School of Social Science
The University of Queensland
St Lucia QLD 4072

Dear Suzanne

Title: *"Why does a criminal record make a difference? An examination of why employers are willing to hire some offenders and not others"*

The School of Social Science Ethical Review Panel (SSERP) has considered your application for ethical clearance to conduct the above project and I am pleased to advise you that approval has been granted under the clearance number [RHD9/2014].

Please remember to advise the committee if you wish to make an amendment to your approved proposal, by submitting an 'Amendments to Approved Proposals' form. Please also quote the above ethical clearance number in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Fitzgerald'.

Dr Robin Fitzgerald
Chair, Social Science Ethical Review Panel.

Appendix 2

Willingness to Hire Survey Instrument & Consent Form

Screen 1

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this PhD research, endorsed by the University of Queensland.

This survey is broken down into four small sections, Part A to Part D. Please answer the questions in each section. The survey should only take you about 10-15 minutes to complete.

You are reminded that your responses will remain confidential at all times.

As explained in the introductory email, you are required to provide your informed consent before starting the survey.

Please click “Next” to go to the informed consent page.

Screen 2



UQ School of Social Science
University of Queensland
Brisbane Qld 4072 Australia
(07) 3365 3236
www.socialscience.uq.edu.au

INFORMED CONSENT

For online survey

You are required to give your informed consent to participate in this study. Please read the following points and if you agree, place a tick in the response box below to indicate your consent:

- I agree to participate in the online survey for the purposes of the research outlined in the participant information guide.
- I understand my role as a participant.
- I understand my participation is entirely voluntary and does not involve any payment or benefits provided to me for my participation.
- I understand my responses will remain anonymous and my confidentiality will be maintained.
- I understand that any contact information provided by me will be given with my consent for the purpose of registering my interest in participating in the face-to-face interview at stage two of the research.
- I understand that by providing my contact information, the researcher has my permission to make further contact with me for the sole purpose of following up my registered interest in participating in a face-to-face interview.
- I am aware that I may withdraw from participating in this research at any time, without penalty.

This study adheres to the Guidelines of the ethical review process of The University of Queensland and the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. Whilst you are free to discuss your participation in this study with project staff, if you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you may contact Assoc. Prof. Chris Clarkson on 3365 3235. Should you wish to make contact with project staff, the principal researcher Suzanne Reich, can be contacted on 0419 797 143 or the project supervisor, Dr Robin Fitzgerald, can be contacted on 3365 2287.

Do you agree to participate in this research? YES ☐

Screen 3

| Please answer the following questions about yourself and your business: | | |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| What is your role in your current workplace? OR Which of the following best describes your position in your company/ organization/place of employment? | Human resources position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Director | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Administrator | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Manager | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Owner | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Other <div>Free response text box</div> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Which of the following best describes the type of industry you work in? | Examples by stratified sample categories: | |
| | Construction / Manufacturing / Factory / Tiling / Plumbing / Landscaping/Yard maintenance / Trade Retail/Services / Earthmoving/Excavation Services / Trade / Fabrication / Concreting / Handyman / Cleaning / Pest Control / Removalists/Transport / Cabinet Makers / Painting / Bricklayers / Automotive Parts & Service / Wholesalers & Warehousing / Retail / Farming / Repair & Maintenance Services / Food Services/Hospitality / Other (Free response) (25) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| How many employees work for you/your company? | 1-10 staff | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 11-20 staff | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 21-50 staff | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 51-100 staff | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 101-200 staff | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | more than 200 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Which of the following best describes your highest level of education | Not completed secondary school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Completed secondary school | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Completed technical and further education | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Tertiary qualification | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| What is the postcode where your business is located? | <div>Free response text box</div> | |

Screen 4

| SCENARIO |
|---|
| <p>You recently advertised a position available with your company/business for a job that does not require any formal qualifications or particular set of skills. The duties of this position require the employee to carry out general duties as needed and any particular training relevant to your workplace will be given on the job. Today you are interviewing John Watson (Wurundjeri), one of the job applicants.</p> <p>John is a 26-year-old Caucasian (Indigenous) Australian male who has applied for employment within your business/company. John arrives at your office on time for his interview and you notice that he appears to be reasonably presented. During the interview, John tells you that he has no formal qualifications and his previous work experience has been in jobs requiring a minimal level of skill. John appears to be motivated to work.</p> |

| Based on what you just read, please rate your agreement with the following: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 = Strongly disagree; 4 = Unsure; 7 = Strongly agree | | | | | | | |
| I would hire John for this job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Screen 5

While going over John's application you notice he has a criminal record. The following information about John's criminal history is made available to you:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Type of crime committed: | <i>Violent</i> |
| Number of convictions: | <i>Single</i> |
| Type of sentence received: | <i>Community service</i> |
| Time lapse since discharge: | <i>Less than 2 years</i> |

Screen 5 cont...

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|---|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| After finding out about John's criminal history, please consider the following statement again and rate your agreement: | | | | | | | |
| 1 = Strongly disagree | | 4 = Unsure | | | 7 = Strongly agree | | |
| I would hire John for this job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Please rate how the following conditions would alter your willingness to hire John if: | | | | | | | |
| 1 = Less likely to hire | | 4 = Unchanged | | | 7 = More likely to hire | | |
| He had multiple convictions on his criminal record instead of a single conviction | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He received a prison sentence instead of community service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| It has been longer than 2 years since he completed his community service | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| His conviction was for theft instead of violence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| His conviction was for drug-related offending instead of violence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He openly disclosed details about his criminal record to you | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He had received specific job skill training appropriate to your industry | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He was employed prior to their conviction | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He completed an employment program after his conviction | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He had built a positive employment record after this most recent offence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| An intermediary agency (e.g. employment agency that screens potential job candidates) referred John for employment with your establishment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He received a certificate from the court where he was first convicted to state he was rehabilitated. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| He was a woman called Jane instead of a man called John | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Screen 6

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------|---|---|-------------------------|---|---|
| Following is a list of organisations that could provide a positive reference for a job applicant with a criminal record. Please rate how your willingness to hire John would alter if a positive reference was available from the following: | | | | | | | |
| 1 = Less likely to hire | | 4 = Unchanged | | | 7 = More likely to hire | | |
| Job placement agency | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Parole or probation agency | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Faith-based (religious) organization | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Prison (if John had received a prison sentence instead of community service) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Programs facilitator (i.e. job training, work readiness program, etc..) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Screen 7

Please rate your agreement with the following:

| My decision to hire John would depend less on his criminal record and more on..... | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|---|---|--------------------|---|---|---|
| 1 = Strongly disagree | 4 = Unsure | | | 7 = Strongly agree | | | |
| ... the way he presents himself e.g. his clothes, cleanliness and grooming. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| ... his ability to interact with others. E.g. good communication skills, friendly, he is likeable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| ... his attitude. E.g. motivated, eager to learn, willing to work, enthusiastic. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| ... his formal qualifications. E.g. prior training, trade certificate, tertiary degree, technical skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| ... his prior work history. E.g. types of jobs he has held, length of time in prior jobs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| ... whether I think he would fit in with my business/company | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Screen 8

Overall...

| | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ... the way John presents himself, his ability to interact with others and his attitude is <i>more important</i> to me when deciding whether to hire him or not than the fact that he has a criminal record. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| ... John's formal qualifications and prior work history is <i>more important</i> to me when deciding whether to hire him or not than the fact that he has a criminal record. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Please feel free to share below any further considerations that have not been covered here that you would deem important when making a hiring decision about John.

| |
|--|
| |
|--|

Screen 9

PART B

Now, thinking about offenders in general, please complete the following:

| Please rate your agreement with the following statements: | Strongly disagree | Moderately disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Moderately agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Most offenders can go on to lead productive lives with help and hard work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Even the worst young offender can grow out of criminal behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Most offenders really have little hope of changing for the better* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Some offenders are so damaged that they can never lead productive lives* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

**Reverse coded*

Screen 10

| Now, thinking about <u>violent</u> offenders, please rate your agreement with the following statements: | Strongly disagree | Moderately disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Moderately agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Most violent offenders can go on to lead productive lives with help and hard work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Even the worst violent offender can grow out of criminal behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Most violent offenders really have little hope of changing for the better* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Some violent offenders are so damaged that they can never lead productive lives* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Screen 11

| Now, thinking about <u>property</u> offenders (e.g. theft, fraud, damage to property), please rate your agreement with the following statements: | Strongly disagree | Moderately disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Moderately agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Most property offenders can go on to lead productive lives with help and hard work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Even the worst property offender can grow out of criminal behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Most property offenders really have little hope of changing for the better* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Some property offenders are so damaged that they can never lead productive lives* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Screen 12

| Now, thinking about <u>drug</u> offenders, please rate your agreement with the following statements: | Strongly disagree | Moderately disagree | Mildly disagree | Mildly agree | Moderately agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Most drug offenders can go on to lead productive lives with help and hard work | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Even the worst drug offender can grow out of criminal behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Most drug offenders really have little hope of changing for the better* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| Some drug offenders are so damaged that they can never lead productive lives* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Screen 13

| Please answer the following questions: | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| In the past, how many employees have you hired with a criminal record? (to the best of your knowledge) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10+ |
| How would you rate the overall quality of your experience of hiring employees with a criminal record? | Very negative | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Negative | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Neither negative or positive | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Positive | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Very positive | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Which of the following best describes the type of policies your company / organization has in place about hiring job applicants with a criminal record? | No such policies | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Policies that <u>restrict</u> hiring applicants with a criminal record | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Policies that <u>prohibit</u> hiring applicants with a criminal record | | | | | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| Please answer the following questions about yourself: | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| How old are you? | 18-30 years <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 31-40 years <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 41-50 years <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | 51 and older <input type="checkbox"/> |
| What is your gender? | Male <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Female <input type="checkbox"/> |

Screen 14

The following list of statements and responses are used in social research to help researchers understand more broadly how people make decisions.

Although these statements may seem unrelated to the rest of the survey, your responses will contribute to a more thorough understanding of what is important and what is not important when it comes to making decisions about others.

Please respond to each statement by selecting either “True” or “False”

| | | |
|--|------|-------|
| I like to gossip at times | TRUE | FALSE |
| There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone | TRUE | FALSE |
| I’m always willing to admit it when I make a mistake | TRUE | FALSE |
| I always try to practice what I preach | TRUE | FALSE |
| I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget | TRUE | FALSE |
| At times I have really insisted on having things my own way | TRUE | FALSE |
| There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things | TRUE | FALSE |
| I never resent being asked to return a favour | TRUE | FALSE |
| I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own | TRUE | FALSE |
| I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone’s feelings | TRUE | FALSE |

Screen 15

I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you in greater depth about your thoughts and opinions around hiring people with a criminal record.

At a later date, I will be conducting face-to-face interviews as a second stage to the overall research project. These interviews are in addition to the survey you have just completed. The face-to-face interviews are expected take about 30 minutes to complete.

Would you be willing to volunteer your time to participate in a face-to-face interview?

If so, please register your willingness by providing your name and contact details below. Please be assured that this information is solely for the purpose of making contact with you in order to schedule a time that is convenient for you to participate in the interview.

Name:

Phone Number:

Email address:

Should you not wish to participate in the face-to-face interviews, please leave the contact details blank and click the “Submit” button below.

Thank you for participating in this online survey. Your valuable contribution as well as the time you have generously given to respond is greatly appreciated.

Appendix 3

Face-to-Face Semi-structured Interview Question Schedule

PROJECT TITLE: Beyond the criminal record: An examination of how and why redeemability beliefs and desistance signals matter for employers' willingness to hire a job applicant with a criminal record.

1. What do you think makes a valuable employee?
2. When you first meet a potential employee, perhaps in an interview setting or something similar, how can you tell they have these qualities/skills/characteristics?
3. What kind of employee do you think somebody with a criminal record would make?

Why do you think that?

4. What does having a criminal record suggest to you about a person?

Why does offence type/sentence type/no. of convictions etc... influence the way you perceive a person with a criminal record? What do these things tell you/suggest to you about the person?

5. Do you think it is possible for someone who has been involved in crime to change?

Did you always think this way? Why? Why not? What changed your mind?

If it was through a positive/negative experience ask the respondent to think back to the person/s and identify retrospectively how that person indicated their change (or not) – when they met, early in the r/ship, after some time.

6. How can you tell that someone who had once been involved in crime is no longer committing offences?

How can you tell someone has changed? Is there something in particular that would suggest this to you?

Are there any particular clues you would regard as more valuable than others? Which ones? Would you look for a number of clues or signals that the person has changed or is one enough? Which one/s? Perhaps paraphrase some the respondent has suggested and ask specifically if any are more valuable than others.

In what way could someone with a criminal record demonstrate to you they are not involved in crime anymore? Or.... What evidence could someone with a criminal record provide to satisfy you that they are no longer involved in crime?

Probe for indicators that employers recognize as signals of desistance / indicators of change

7. Job applicants who have a criminal record may present with a variety of external and personal credentials.

External credentials are things like being referred by an employment referral service, having a reference from another agency like a faith-based organization, maybe even their probation and parole officer, or perhaps having completed an employment program as part of their sentence.

Personal credentials relate to things that can only be done or achieved by the individual such as having prior work experience, undertaking specific job skill training or openly disclosing their criminal record to you.

Thinking about these two types of credentials, how would they influence your decision to hire the person or not? *Why is that?*

Why do personal credentials have more influence on your decision than external credentials? Or vice versa?

Can you think of anything else/different that might contribute to you being more likely to hire someone with a criminal record? Why do these things make a difference for you?

8. There are a few states across the United States that have a system in place, which provides ex-offenders with a Certificate of Rehabilitation. Ex-offenders who obtain the certificate, have some of their civil and political rights restored (e.g. able to apply for certain job licences that would otherwise be off-limits with a criminal record). To obtain this certificate, however, ex-offenders must be able to demonstrate they meet certain criteria. Also, this is limited to only certain types of offenders.

If a system like this was introduced in Australia, do you think it would help employers in deciding whether or not to hire someone with a criminal record? *Why? Why not?*

9. If you were considering a job applicant who had a criminal record for employment within your company/business, what would encourage you to give the applicant a go?

What would be your greatest concerns?

What benefits do you think you might gain from hiring someone with a criminal record?